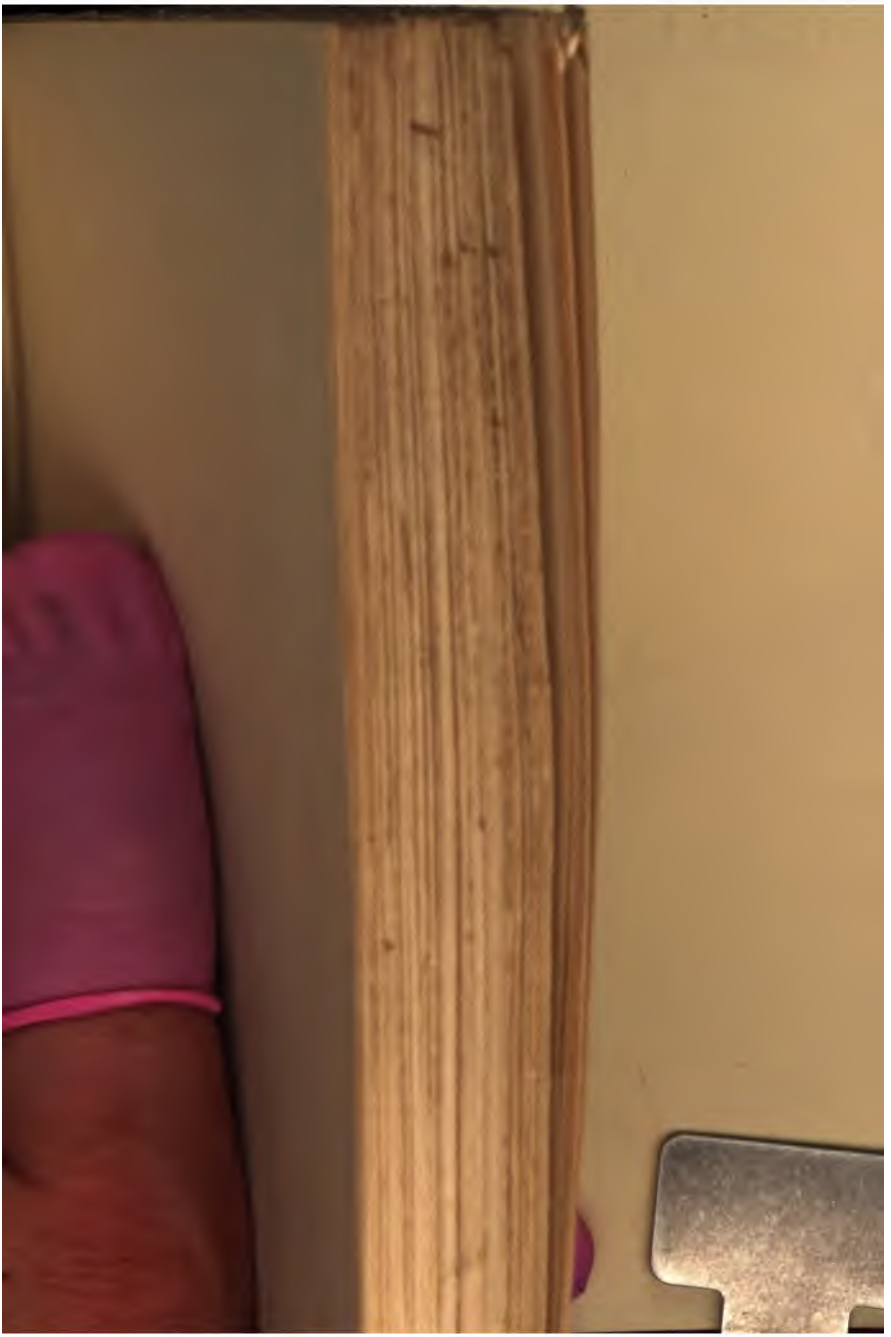

BESSIE LANG

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BY

ALICE CORKRAN

"The God of *Love*—ah, benedicite!
How mighty and how great a Lord is He
For He of low hearts can make high; if high
He can make low, and unto death bring nigh;
And hard hearts He can make kind and free."

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BESSIE LANG.

CHAPTER I.

"TAKE it away—take it away! I'll not look at it!" says Dame Martin, her head averted, her eyes shut, her hands uplifted, the more effectively to screen the sight of the sketch I am holding up. It is a sketch of the Beck, in the fresh morning, as it hurries over stones under glinting leaves.

"I always think," she continues, more composedly, as I put the water-colour drawing out of sight, "that pictures are senseless things, no more like what they are meant for than your dried ferns are like the green growing ones—stiff and stark, like dead bodies!"

"Now, Mistress Martin, I am offended," I answer, shoving my portfolio into a corner. "You've

likened my picture to something stiff and stark, like a dead body, and you must soothe my feelings."

"Never mind," says the Dame; "it is not your picture only, it is every picture that ever was painted, I hate!"

Dame Martin is a tall, hale old woman—clean as the elder-blossoms that spread their whiteness in front of her windows. Her spare skirt is black, and over her chest a white linen kerchief is folded. Not a vestige of hair can be seen under the cap, the frill of which forms a frame to her face. She reminds me of the picture in the National Gallery, set down as the portrait of Rembrandt's mother; but her features are thinner; her eyes light up with a certain sparkle which I cannot imagine brightening those of the painted lady's. She is nearly eighty, but Time in his passage has left her few infirmities.

There are a few gaps among her teeth, and she is rather deaf; but she is straight as a sapling, and she is proud of the fact that she need only put on spectacles for her Sunday read.

This Sunday read is the only intellectual employment the Dame indulges in. Her activity is practical, and it springs from her heart. She is just a woman to be a mother of men, but she is childless. In the joyous benevolence, in the eager liberality, of her nature, she is the typical mother—the right

woman to be placed at the head of some order of sisters of mercy organising and dispensing comfort. Here, at Carbeck, not a child is born that Mistress Martin has not helped into the world; she is nurse at every sick and dying bed; she has assisted at every baptism and funeral in the village. Weddings being the tying of the bond between blissful and healthy couples, Dame Martin does not consider her presence requisite at them. "To fend" for herself and for others is Mistress Martin's motto. If she spoke in maxims, she would have plagiarised a great man's axiom, and enunciated, "To work is to live."

Carbeck is a hamlet set in the heart of the lake country, and is known by few. How I came upon this fragrant and peaceful corner of the earth fell out in this wise: I was at Passmore, one of a reading party, when, in a pedestrian excursion, I sprained my ankle as we passed through Carbeck, and lay sprawling helpless on the ground. As a matter of course, Dame Martin was sent for by the good folk who saw my plight, and, also as a matter of course, when she came she ordered me to her farm, where, thanks to my crippled condition, I was cherished by her.

My books followed me. Then began Dame Martin's expostulations. "At it again!" she would say, with a dry chuckle; "well, I'd as soon think

to keep putting victuals inside my stomach all the day long to make myself strong, as to be always putting other folk's thoughts inside my head to make myself wise."

"Mistress Martin," said I, "there's more philosophy in your speech than you dream of. How do thoughts come to you?"

"I never think," replied the Dame. "When I fend, the thoughts come of themselves. When you help the babies to come into the world, you do not know from where; and you lay out the dead that are gone, you do not know where to,—then the thoughts come. Bless you! ye might cross your hands then, and think all the day long about the things you can never know the reason of, no more than you can tell how the stars keep their place up in the sky without a hand to hold them there. If ye did not bustle the thinking out of ye, ye'd have no time left to set the things straight under your hand, ye know how to. Nay, nay; I do not care for your readings and thinkings. If you want to read, read your Bible, say I, and not too much of that." Then, as if reconsidering her words, "Is not God always writing the Bible in nature? That's plainer for simple folk."

Time has left few traces of his scythe in Dame Martin's outward appearance, but years, I am sure, have deepened her peculiarities. I cannot imagine

my hostess at any time accepting meekly an opinion at variance with her own; now she is decidedly dictatorial. I am sure Dame Martin, even as a maiden, was not shy of speech; now she is certainly garrulous, a village chronicle, impatient of contradiction. Her love of nature is sincere. There is an enthusiasm about the old woman. In times of civil war I could imagine her some Rob Roy's wife, for she has all the instincts of clanship, and is faithful in the fashion of a dog or a Highlander.

It was strange she did not care for art. Evidently she hated it; and I was very inquisitive to know why. Her language was so spontaneous and picturesque, her observations at times so keen and original—she was altogether so different from the surrounding bucolics that gazed with open-mouthed admiration at my sketches—that I felt puzzled and somewhat put out at her prejudice against them and pictures in general. I felt sure there was some reason for it.

Her husband, I found out, had been different from the ordinary run of farmers and yeomen forming the staple of the population here. A Scotchman by birth, the son of a minister, he had begun life as a schoolmaster. In a holiday trip to the lake country, he had fallen in love with my hostess—then Nancy Lang—married her, and for her sake gave up the old home and settled down in

Carbeck. He had been schoolmaster of the endowed schools here the few years he lived after his marriage.

I fancy he was a sort of Dominie Sampson. There was a row of queer old books kept carefully dusted in Dame Martin's room—Greek and Latin and old English classics. From what I gathered, he had no turn for farming; but all agreed that he was "deeply learned." Dame Martin had all the practical genius. Now, after over forty years' widowhood, the old love remains warm and admiring; but mixed with it is still an element of pitying protection, such as we give to a child. With natural inconsistency, notwithstanding her faithfulness to her dominie's memory, Dame Martin looks down upon book-learning; yet, being a woman of remarkable receptivity, she owed to that companionship of nine years more than she is aware of. Her marriage accounted for much of the superior development of her intellect, but it made her antipathy to art all the more mysterious to me.

One morning the revelation I had wished for came. "This is better than a picture," said the Dame to me.

From a drawer in a black oak press she produced some leaves that, on looking over, I saw were the dry and tabulated records of scientific discoveries. There were three sheets of outline drawings—geo-

metrical-looking, bewildering in their intersection of lines, curves, radii, arcs, and tangents; a scale of feet, another of chains in the right-hand corner, and explanations of the signs used, written in a careful hand. On other leaves was appended what was evidently a more specific and particular explanation of the invention represented in the drawings. The whole was described in that careful writing—"Plan for making more direct the connection of the steam cylinders with the driving or propelling wheels on one axle." Lastly, I unrolled a legal document that proved to be the specification for a patent granted to William Troughton for the space of nine years, for his exclusive right to the invention described in the drawings.

"You're a learned man," says Dame Martin; "you understand that."

"No," I reply, mortified, turning the pages over. "I do not understand a word of it. But I recognise the name William Troughton. Is he not an engineer? Has he not built something?"

"Yes," answers Dame Martin, slowly nodding her head. "He built many things. So long as there are stones and iron to make bridges for your trains to go shrieking over the country, so long his name will bide. But it was not for the man his genius made him I loved Bill; it was for the heart of the lad."

"That is the reason you like those flat drawings better than pictures," I say, half in jest.

"Better than a thousand pictures! Better than all the pictures that ever were painted!" replies the Dame energetically. "But here—I suppose you like this better,"—and out of the same oak press she hands me a book bound in blue cloth, dimmed and soiled. I open it, and I see it is full of manuscript poetry, principally of the ballad kind. Some is transcribed in a sprawling handwriting, loose and untidy. The greater part is inserted in minute printed letters, legible as type. It would seem as if the writer had adopted this form of caligraphy for the sake of distinctness, as if he were writing out the verses for a child. Nothing could be greater than the contrast between those dainty Roman letters and the slovenly, erratic-looking handwriting. But what arrested my attention at once were the illustrations to the ballads. Sometimes they crept up the margin, and surrounded the poetry; sometimes a painted page had been pasted in between the written ones. It was not so much the grace and beauty of form, of which the designs possessed no small share—rather it was their suggestiveness, I might almost say their mysticism, that interested me. This was no tyro's endeavour, no amateur's performance; it was an artist's work. Touch firm and free, colour lucid, chiaroscuro per-

haps somewhat daringly effective. Above all, what charmed me was the power by which, in a few touches, all the impression of the scene was conveyed. For instance, here the mellow moon shone over the charmed lake, trees, and placid fields, while the mountains lay like sleeping gods; and there was conveyed to the mind all the subtle, holy passion of night. It was night, girt round with prayer and love, walking under her purple pavilion, with perfumed breath and dew-laden garment, over the earth. Further on, it was a pool fettered with water-lilies, in whose blossoms lay curled up baby spirits asleep; faintly under the beryl-like water could be seen dim forms of sleeping nymphs, floating with arms clasped above their heads, and the duckweed was their long green hair. Then again it was a misty scene, in which a solitary shaft of crimson light cleaves the vapour: there was an expression of weird passion and aspiration in this that smote the heart and set it dreaming.

"You like them?" said Dame Martin, jealously, before I had half done looking over the sketches.

"Yes," I answered; "and what delights me in those drawings is the clue they give to the man. You often get out of a sketch more than you do out of years' acquaintanceship."

"They tell you more than this!" exclaimed the Dame, holding up the flat diagram.

"They do," I reply, laughing. "That only brings to my mind suggestions of the Patent Office."

"Well you're not the first clever man who is as easily caught by appearances as a mouse is led into a trap by the smell of a bit of toasted cheese," says Dame Martin, with scorn, making a sweep of drawing, diagram, and book, and returning them to the oak chest, which she locks with a snap.

Then, after a pause, during which I feel keenly my disgrace, Dame Martin mutters softly—

"Bill's story might make a book."

"His story! Had he a story? Now I am interested. Tell it to me!" I cry.

"Nay, nay, not to-night—another day. To-morrow, maybe, I'll tell it you," says the old woman, in a voice that lags.

"And I suppose there's also a story connected with the blue book?" I say, diffidently.

"Yes," answers Dame Martin, faintly. Then she added, after another silence—

"I'll tell you all about it another day—perhaps to-morrow."

But the morrow came, and she put off telling me the story. She who was so prone to narrate every incident that had happened in the village during her lifetime, telling the tale with the freshness and zest of the born story-teller, paused before this

memory; and yet I felt it was the very foreground of all her recollections.

She put off telling me what I had grown really curious to hear; but I drew from her that William Troughton had been born at Carbeck, that he was the only son of a widowed mother, that when he was a little lad he minded her cows, and carried her fruit and vegetables to the neighbouring market.

"Did he marry here?" I asked.

"Ay, that's the story. I'll tell you some day," Dame Martin replied hurriedly, and I fancied the old face changed.

The first time I ascended the mountain or pike that towers above Carbeck, it was on the eve of my leaving the place. I no longer hobbled, and must return. As I sat on the edge of the mountain's spur, and looked down on the hamlet that roamed up hill and down dale for the space of a mile, and noted it lying so peacefully in the low sunlight, I could not restrain a devout thanksgiving that as yet it had not been made the theme of a newspaper article—that the guide-book dismisses the mention of it in a few lines. Very few have found it out. The world at large knows nothing of its green pastures and still waters, its grey farmhouses peeping through trees, and its vast setting of hills that surround it on every side, and behind

which the sun sets and rises. From the height I stood at, it looked like a child's toy. I might have covered with my hat the farm-houses, the church with the square steeple, surrounded by upright slabs, under which the dead Carbeckians sleep, while their descendants sow and reap and mind their crops, as they did in their day. The ale-house stands in the centre of the village. The sign, battered by rain and wind, hangs over the door where the Carbeckians from time immemorial have gone in and out and quaffed the "Goodman's" ale.

As I sat in my "skyey tent," I could not but wonder how it came about that William Troughton was born here. In this quiet corner of the earth, that looked as much a dream as the "Happy Valley" of which Rasselas grew so weary, it was strange that one of the foremost hewers of the iron roads should have been born and bred. Here the young, active mind had been haunted by the thought of some great work it might achieve. Here, most like, the man had loved and suffered.

That evening I said to my hostess, "Now for my story. I am going in two days, and I won't be put off any more. There will be no more to-morrows."

"So you must go away," said Dame Martin. "Shall you find anything so fair as this in your town?" And she pointed to where the hills were

cutting with their calm majestic outlines the faint green sky, and throwing long shadows across the meadows where the hay-stacks were gathered in fragrant heaps, and a trout-stream chanted its happy solo as it leaped over tiny rocks.

"I've sucked dry all the thoughts contained in my books, and I must get a fresh supply to replenish myself with," I answer gravely.

Mistress Martin gives a grim laugh, but does not take up my sally.

"I'll tell you Bill's story now," she replies, looking into the fire.

Before I relate the story she told me that night, let me conjure up the scene to my reader. A sanded kitchen, panelled with dark oak; a dark oak press and clock, and a wealth of crockery about. In a high-back chair, by the chimney corner, Dame Martin sits; her frilled cap shines out against the dark setting. Her spare figure, her thin, animated face, seem to fit into the framework, that in the firelight assumes a sombre, homely beauty.

She talks in the broad, soft dialect of Cumberland, flavoured with Scotch inflexions and terms borrowed from the schoolmaster of long ago.

I have not endeavoured to imitate the old lady's pronunciation, except here and there, when the word came laden with strange new force or pathos.

The tale made an impression upon me, and now I write it down from memory. It is some time since I heard it. Occupations of various kinds kept me from doing more than jotting down a few notes of it, and I feel that much of the quaint, forcible way in which it was related by the Dame is lost in my rendering.

CHAPTER II.

Ay, ay, it's a queer place, says Dame Martin, chuckling. I come from the big farm a little way up yon hill. The biggest farm about here. It belongs to George Lang, my nephew. There's always a George Lang at Carbeck. It's an institution, like the rector. A George Lang settled down here, I do not know how many hundred years ago, and his son was called George, and he called his son George, and so long as there are mountains, a river, and streams in Carbeck, so long we think there will be a George Lang ruling the roost at the farm.

It would not do to have a daughter, or a dozen daughters, and no son, for daughters are to have nothing of the land. We are a funny people! Cannot a woman manage a farm as well as a man? But it is the men who have made the laws, and they have settled that because they are strongest in bodies, they are strongest in wits.

When my brother was master, it was a long

time thought there would be no George Lang any more, for he had only a daughter. We began to fancy the mountains would come down and cover Carbeck, for we could not fancy it without a George Lang at the farm. Providence must have thought so too, for it took away the mother who had only brought a daughter into the world. After two years my brother married again a strapping lass, who gave him a boy before the year was out. Now we knew it was all right again. There would be another George Lang, even before the clergyman asked at the font, "What name do ye give this child?" He knew it well enough himself, did Mr Orwell, and scarcely waited for an answer. The baby did not cry, but took to his name pleasantly, like stepping into his own shoes. Bessie was the name of the girl whose mother had been George's first wife, and, although I should not say so, who was her aunt, she was the winsomest bairn in all Carbeck. She was like a child in a ballad, not like one coming from rough people. She was very slight, and her hair was like the autumn leaves, a bit ruddy and golden, on which the sun shines. On the rainiest day it had a glimmer as if a ray of the sun lay always on it. Her eyes were brown, and—it may be fancy—I thought an elf bided in them, as they say nixies bide in the tarns; for they were so mischievous and soft, and all manner of looks were in

them. She was the bonniest bairn! To hear her laugh made you glad. There is a heap of sorrows in the world, but Bessie's laugh was bright enough to make you forget sorrow a while. It made you feel like stepping into the sunshine to hear it ringing outside your door. I loved the child like the one thing left me to live for in the world. My good man was dead, and I had no bairns. When George married again, I would have taken her for my own, but he would not let her go. I think he loved the child better than anything else — better than his second wife or the baby, although it was the George Lang we had all been waiting for and wanting, and wondering what would come to Carbeck without. And for the matter of that, her stepmother was very good to her too.

Bill was my neighbour widow Troughton's son. He was not a handsome lad—a bit clumsy in make —but he had honest grey eyes, that looked you straight in the face when he spoke. He had a broad forehead, and he was the best scholar of his age in the village. Mr Orwell was proud of Bill. He would not have boys in the endowed schools who would not learn. He turned them away. He would not mind the complaints of parents. "I'll not waste my time teaching a dunce," he would say. "Let him go and mind the geese on the common."

Bill was Bessie's sweetheart, soon as she could

run about on her little feet and get into mischief, which she did soon enough, I can tell you. In rain or shine they were always together, in Bill's play hours. I used to watch them, when I was spinning or making butter. Bessie with her hair tossed and ruddy, chirping like a grasshopper at sunset—never silent a minute—her eyes dancing with mischief, and he very silent and solemn in comparison. He was not so nimble with his tongue or in his play as she. But they loved each other with all their hearts, and were as happy as the birds in spring, when together.

Mr Orwell was our rector, and he taught in the endowed schools. He was a very funny man, was Mr Orwell. He was very tall, with rough grey hair. And except at services, he always wore a brown suit, with leather gaiters up to his knees. He never forgot, however, to put on his white neckcloth —that was the sign of his profession. I thought it did not suit him just under his red face. A wee bit clergyman and all the rest farmer. He was always amongst his sheep on the six days, and on the seventh he minded us, his spiritual sheep, as he called us. We all liked Mr Orwell. He always had a gruff, pleasant word for each of us. He was like one of ourselves. He had grown old among us, and knew all about our families. He would come in quite friendly and sit down by the chimney-corner, and

take his glass of grog, and tell anecdotes about our fathers and grandfathers, and laugh such a loud laugh, all his body would shake with it. He did not talk much of religion, but we did not mind that. We went all of us to church on Sundays regular. Mr Orwell would come, walking up the aisle and stop to talk to one or another on his way.

"And how are your ewes this cold weather, Mistress Martin?" or "John, and how is the coo that had the mouth-disease last week?" he would ask quite heartily. Then he would go into the vestry for a minute and come out dressed in his surplice. If it was very cold, he would put it on before us all in the pulpit and not go into the vestry at all. There was a stove in the church close to the pulpit, and it was warmer there. In those cold days he shortened the services. "The Lord will excuse long prayers," he would say, as if he knew all about the Lord's thoughts on the subject, "when there are six feet snow on the ground." And after five or six prayers he would let us go home again. It seems quite shocking now that Mr Hare makes the services so grand. But we thought nothing of it then.

I was in Mr Orwell's library one day when Mr Greaves, the curate of Grassmere, came over to ask Mr Orwell to institute evening services at Carbeck. Sitting down, his hands folded, dressed all in respectable black, was Mr Greaves, speaking in a very quiet

voice. Standing up, with his back to the fire, looking down on his guest, was Mr Orwell, dressed in his brown suit and gaiters, his red face beaming above his white neckcloth, not a cloud of solemnity on it.

"Nay, nay," he said, "no evening services here for the lads and the lasses." Then with a funny drawl, and half closing his eyes, that were twinkling, "Evening services might make more marriages in Carbeck, Mr Greaves, but I'll not interfere in Heaven's business."

Mr Orwell was a widower. He had not been very happy in his married life, some said; and maybe he thought, if Heaven made marriages, it was not the best thing It did.

I remember like yesterday the occasion that brought Bill into Mr Orwell's notice. He was just eight then, and he still went to the infant school, kept by Mr Horton, the parish clerk.

It was one Sunday in church. Bessie was by his side, a wee bairn of four, looking about her with her shining eyes.

Mr Orwell began to read the psalm of the twelfth day. "You're wrong, sir!" shouted Mr Horton from under the pulpit. "It's the eleventh day, not the twelfth."

"Nay, nay," answered Mr Orwell stoutly, looking down where the clerk stood, "it's the twelfth. I

had my sheep sheared on Wednesday—that was the seventh of the month. I marked it down."

"It's the eleventh, sheep or no sheep," cried the clerk. I knew he was getting angry, for his wooden leg was thumping against the floor, as it did when any one contradicted him. He was accustomed to have his way with the children, and he was dictatorial, was Mr Horton. "Is not the fair held to-morrow, and is it not always held on the twelfth?"

"Why, man!" cried Mr Orwell, laughing, "according to your showing the twelfth of June could never fall on a Sunday, as 'tis against the law the fair should be held on the Sabbath. Cannot the fair come off on the thirteenth, once in a while, to make way for the Lord's day? Nay, nay, my mark is better than yours."

Some of us began to laugh also, and now most of the congregation joined in, and some, especially the women, sided with Mr Orwell and said it was the twelfth, and the men that it was the eleventh, and a good many shook their heads and could not tell which it was. It was not like the inside of a church. We were all talking together, like the day when the Lord confounded the speech of men.

All at once, up stood Bill—a little white, for he did not like standing up before so many. I had watched him counting on his fingers several times

over to make sure he was right. "It is the eleventh, sir!" he said, looking up straight at Mr Orwell, "because the lambs were sheared on Wednesday the seventh;" and then he counted aloud on his fingers, Thursday the eighth, and so on, holding up the little finger, that was for Sunday the eleventh.

"You're right, my lad!" said Mr Orwell, heartily, "and you give just reason for your assertion. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,"—he muttered, with the twinkle in his eye, and then he went on with the service.

I noticed Bessie was very silent and serious the rest of the time. As we were walking home, she and Willy going before, her wee hand held in his, she said in a hushed voice, "If it had not been for you, Willy, we would have said the wrong prayers to God!"

I am sure she had been turning about in her little head what trouble would have befallen us if we had said the wrong prayers, and that Bill had saved us from a great calamity.

From that day Mr Orwell began to take notice of Bill, placing him soon in the endowed schools, and setting him tasks at home. Bill grew very learned. It was wonderful how handy he was. He would mend Bessie's broken dolls. But what he liked best doing was little clay engines out of the descriptions he read of in books Mr Orwell lent him. It was

about the time railways were beginning to be spoken of, and the different ways of making engines. Bill would get reeds and hollow corks and clay, putting them all together. He would work at these, solemn as a raven, for hours together, beginning again when he went wrong; and Bessie would look on, sometimes cutting the reeds or the hemlocks for him, under his direction, to make the pipes for his engine. "That boy's got genius!" Mr Orwell would say; "his mother and all Carbeck will be proud of him yet!"

I remember, it was one Saturday, I thought that the marriage had been arranged in Heaven of my bairn and Bill.

You were not here in July, so you do not know what rush Sunday means. In the old times, it is said, before there were floors to the church, on the last Sunday in July the people strewed the ground of their church with fresh-gathered rushes. They remained there till the next July came round, and the old ones were taken away, and new ones put down. Now, the custom is kept up, but it is the children who do it. They go out to the lakes, the tarns, and the rivers, and they gather the rushes and the water-lilies. It is no longer to strew the floor of the church, but they make them into crosses and wreaths, and they bring them on the Saturday to the church, where they are hung up for a remembrance of the old way, and on the Monday they are

taken down again, when a treat is given to the children in the fields.

Although her mother was very good to Bessie, and to her father she was like the apple of his eye, it was I who spoilt her, and made for her the pretty things she loved. It was my joy to work for her in secret something I knew she would like. To watch when I gave it to her, the look of gladness brimming over her brown eyes, and waking the pretty dimples in her cheek—then to feel the tight clasp of her arms round my neck.

I had arranged Bessie's rushes into a large cross, and there were four water-lilies set in wet moss in the corners, and the biggest, whitest, with the goldenest core, I set in the centre. Shining there, it made me think of my gude maun's innocent soul, all aflame with the love of wisdom. It was a beautiful cross. The light I had been watching for came into Bessie's eyes when she saw it, and she hugged me, jumping for joy. Then she ran, putting out her tiny arms to carry the cross. It was very heavy, and a little look of pain came into her face as she tried to lift it, although the light remained in her eyes. She had a white frock on, and her hair of ruddy gold streamed about her neck. As I looked at her, her mouth a wee bit drawn, her eyes looking up and shining, a hidden pain came into my heart. She was like an old picture I had seen once of the

Magdalene, holding on to the Saviour's cross. It was just like the face of the woman become a child again. I could have cried out. I took the cross away, for I could not bide my white lamb to look like the Magdalene, although the Lord forgave the poor soul.

Bill was standing looking also at Bessie, and it struck me he had a queer sort of expression, as if he too saw something different in her. He was twelve then, and she was eight. He was older than his years, as she was younger.

"Bill, you'll carry my cross for me," cried Bessie, running up to him in her coodly way.

"Yea, yea, I'll carry it for ye—I'll carry it all the way," answered Bill, sturdily.

They set off together, and I watched them from the door-step. I remember it like yesterday. There had not been rain for days, and the haymakers were in the fields. The broad backs of the mountains were shining in the sun. I saw the children going down the winding pathway together, he carrying the cross, she with tiny footsteps running alongside of him.

I saw them join the other children bearing such offerings; the church-bells were ringing; the band was playing before them.

I watched them until they went in at the church-door, and it closed behind them. Then I found I

had been weeping, as I watched them. I had been thinking all the while of my gude maun. It was what he had always done. Although he was so guileless he had carried my cross for me, and I had walked with no burden by his side. This seemed like a sign that Bessie would not walk alone this sad life as I had done, since my husband had laid the cross down and I had taken it up—that Bill would carry her cross, and she would walk by his side, cheering him by her love.

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH Mr Orwell would not have evening services, because they might make marriages, yet the lads and the lasses came together and married and had children, just as their parents had done before them. Lord bless you! every one always did the same thing at Carbeck. One epitaph would have done for all the people in the churchyard. One a bit richer and another a bit poorer. Some having more children than others, and some worse harvests, and that's all the variation there need be.

When Bessie was about fourteen, George thought he would send her to a boarding-school right off at Manchester. The lassie nearly cried her eyes out at the thought of it. No girl or boy had ever left Carbeck yet for education: all the learning had been got at the Dame's school, and then at the endowed schools for the boys who could pass examinations in reading and writing. It was hard to part with Bessie. It seemed to me a pity to alter her faults;

they were part of her. She was a bright lassie then, with all sorts of wild ways of her own. She could not wash a dish up but she must sing over it, or leave it half washed to have a run in the garden; and when she was milking the cows night and morning, it was just as if a lark was filling the fields with its carolling; it made your heart glad, her voice was so blithe. Bessie had never been cooped up but at the Dame's school, and there, bless you! she had played truant oftener than any other girl had. To get wet-footed in the tarns, and lose her way in a mountain scramble—to be off in the woods tearing her skirts in the brambles, and up amongst the branches of the trees, nimble as a squirrel, peeping into the birds' nests, and learning how to chirp like them, was what she liked best doing. Now, her father said, she must go to school, and get over her wild ways, and be tamed down and become a lady.

"You'll learn French and the piano, my bairn," I said to console her.

"I'll learn as little as I can," answered Bessie, sobbing behind her apron.

And she kept her word. The going to a boarding-school lasted three months. Bessie pined among the chimneys and wharves; she fell ill, and we had to take her home, and let her do as she liked. Plenty of a kind of learning she had, but not learn-

ing from books. Bill was her teacher. He was always studying, was Bill. And he taught her the names of the flowers, and all sorts of things about the birds and insects; even about the stones he'd have somewhat to say. Bill would tell it all in his plain way, and Bessie would repeat what he said with all sorts of fancies of her own. To listen to the two, you'd have thought those senseless things the birds and flowers had a kind of soul. It was pretty to hear them, and I would feel as if nature was full of wit. Then there was not another girl in the village to match her for making the butter and knitting the stockings; and not one could tell stories like her about the spectres of Gauter Fell, and the fish that never die in Bowscade Tarn, for she believed in the nixies and water-witches.

Mr Orwell thought no end of Bill; I fancy he looked upon himself as Bill's father in a kind of way. After he got him into the endowed schools, he taught him all sorts of things at his own house of an evening. He was a great scholar, was Mr Orwell, I've heard say: when he was digging away at his potatoes, he would go on talking to himself at the top of his voice in a queer tongue. First time I heard him, I thought he had gone daft, but Bill said he was reciting verses in Latin.

"I'll teach the lad all I know," said Mr Orwell to Bill's mother. "It's something to give a helping

hand to a genius. Maybe, ma'am, when some one's writing your son's life, they'll mention me in it."

And away he stalked over the fields, with Sancho, his dog, at his heels. Sancho was as much of a character as his master. He was the busiest dog; from sunrise to sunset he was never still, running backwards and forwards from the sheep to the pigs and the cows, putting his nose into the poultry yard to see matters were right there. He never gnawed his bone in peace, or stretched himself out in the sun to sleep. And when he took a walk with Mr Orwell, you saw the thought of the animals was always on his mind. If his master stayed away too long, Sancho would pace off by himself, taking a short cut home across the fields to look after the beasts. He was nothing but skin and bone, with a careworn expression in his eyes.

Of course we none of us thought Bill a genius. There never had been a genius at Carbeck, and we thought it was Mr Orwell's way of talking. None of the lads were jealous of Bill. We were like a family, all in a way connected, and we were proud of having some one who was not a "dunce," as Mr Orwell said the other boys were. He was quiet as a dormouse about himself, was Bill. He was very silent; somehow he was awkward at talking. He was always busy working out some problem Mr Orwell had set him, or that he had got hold of in a

book; or making or mending something. Bessie called him the "cobbler general;" and, sure enough, his room, and his drawers, and pockets, were always full of shoes, clocks, broken dolls, fading flowers. He had all kinds of little instruments that he used quite handily, with which he mended the things. Everything that had anything the matter with it was brought to Bill, and he would cobble it up.

It seems like yesterday only, that I looked on as he took farmer Grey's watch to pieces, as neat as possible. It wanted only to be cleaned, Bill said; but it was just a sight to watch the old man's face as he looked on at his watch falling to bits. It was so piteous. The watch had been his grandfather's, and it had ticked in his pocket for twenty years and more. Bill looked quite cool, his hand steady as ever, but the vein in his forehead was a bit swelled, and there was a little frown between the eyebrows, as there always was, when he was very intent on his work. Bessie was looking over his shoulder, silent for a wonder; her pretty face had a scared look, for it would have been dreadful if farmer Grey's big watch had never told the time again.

I shut my eyes when Bill began to rub the empty case. Farmer Grey did not seem to be breathing; his eyes followed every movement of Bill's hand, as if he would not lose sight of it for a second. I

could not look again until I heard Bessie clap her hands, and the old man give a sort of long-drawn sigh. "It's just a marvel," said farmer Grey, when Bill gave him back his watch, chirping quite jauntily, putting it back so quickly into his pocket, and buttoning it up tight. "I'd as soon have thought o' hearing a dead mavis sing as to hear its bra' voice once more a-ticking the time."

"If we all fell to pieces Bill would mend us up again," Bessie said triumphantly, patting Bill's head.

"Nay, nay, Bessie," was all Bill answered; but a flush passed over his broad forehead, and the corners of his mouth twitched, for Bessie more often teased than praised him.

Although Bill was always working or thinking, he was a brave lad too. Have ye noticed the bell that stands in the market-place? It was called the challenge bell; for it was the custom when a lad in one of the neighbouring villages, or a Carbeck lad, wished to try his strength at wrestling with another, he would pull the bell. Was there not a hurry-scurry when on market-days the bell would be heard a-ding-donging? The puller of the bell would challenge the wearer of the champion belt to a match, and then the day and the hour for it would be fixed. The lads and the lasses assembled on the village green in the valley to watch the con-

test. It was generally late in the afternoon, and it was a pretty sight to see the tops of the hills all alight, and the blue mists gathering in the chasms in the background, while on the grass lay the long shadows, and the bits of colour in the girls' dresses shone, and in front the forms of the wrestlers looked strong and lithe in the sunlight. Bill was generally the winner, and wore the champion belt. It was difficult to get it from him. He had a reputation for miles around. Indeed we thought a deal more of his muscles than we did of his genius.

A great event happened to Bill when he was nineteen. He won the purse a rich lady had left in her will to pay for the expenses of a poor lad from Cumberland at the University of Edinburgh. It was Mr Orwell set Bill to try for it; and he got it over all the young men who were the cleverest in the neighbouring villages for miles around. The gentlemen who examined him were, I heard say, astonished at his learning. "Ye do Mr Orwell credit," they said to him. And Mr Orwell was so proud when he heard it, that he panted and wiped his face with his red pocket-handkerchief, until you could not tell which was the redder of the two.

"He's not a stupid lad," he kept repeating, with a broad, beaming look over his face, and wagging his head.

It was a great loss for widow Troughton to lose her son's keep of her farm for three years. But, bless you! she did not think of that. We had all laughed at the thought of Bill's genius, but she had believed in it. She had carried in her heart all that Mr Orwell had said of him. "Can't I do my share of the work as I used to when he was a toddling bairn?" she said gleefully. "When he's a rich man I'll take my ease, I promise you. I'll have my pinch of snuff and my arm-chair quite cosy." Bill was to be away all the autumn and winter and part of the spring; but in summer he was to be home again. It was in a humble way he must live in Edinburgh, for the allowance was not a large one. Bill decided that he would walk all the way; but his books were to go by coach.

On the evening before he set off he was standing in my front garden with Bessie. It had rained all day, but now it was fair. There was like a golden lake in the sky set amidst the clouds, that were like mountains all round it. The poles of the scarlet-runners and the tall hollyhocks came straight against the light. Bessie was a slim girl of fifteen, and her figure in its coarse blue dress was like a shadow, only her brown chestnut hair caught the light, and shone in a little line of fire round her head. Bill was near her, not quite so tall as she.

"You'll forget us far away," said Bessie, in a half-pouting, half-wilful way.

"You know I cannot forget you, Bessie," said Bill, after a moment's silence, in a gentle, solemn voice. "Ye know that I cannot. That when I look back into the past, ye are like my life looking at me out of it.

"There are pretty lasses in Edinburgh," continued Bessie, looking down, and digging with the tip of her shoe into the wet earth.

"It's not prettiness," answered Bill, more quickly than before, "nor is it goodness. I suppose it is that I must love you, Bessie—that I can't help myself. So long as I bide in this world I must love you, and in the next world if I have a heart left to love with."

Next day he went away; and the three years he was away Bessie grew more winsome every day. She was like a bit of summer let into my life. Her very vanities I loved. She was very saucy, but her saucy words never hurt; and if they hurt they were all the sweeter for the simple atonements, and the pretty regrets, that followed them.

At the end of the first year Bill brought back the prize for mathematics. One soaking morning in spring, when the third year was over, the door was suddenly flung open, and Bessie, all dripping wet and out of breath, entered. She had a newspaper

in her hand, and a letter. She shut the door, and leaning back against it, panted forth, laughing, "Auntie, Bill is a genius—a real, live genius."

"Well," says I, standing in the middle of the room, with my porridge-stick in my hand, "Mr Orwell always said so."

"Mr Orwell! yes," said Bessie, a little disdainfully; "but I never believed it. Never, not for a minute! But here the paper says so. There is a whole half column all about him. Look!" and she put her finger down the page. "And the rector has said it, and all the professors. Is it not grand, just?" And then, throwing the paper up in the air, she caught it and twirled round the room. Then suddenly putting her arms about my neck, she said, with a little sob in her throat, and her eyes laughing and crying together, "Won't widow Troughton be glad to see it in the paper and all!"

There was no doubt there was a whole lot about Bill. He had sent the paper with an account of the prize-giving and the speeches to Bessie, asking her to tell his mother. He had won the prize for geometry, and the highest mathematics and chemistry, but the great thing was that Bill had invented a brake. There were all sorts of inventions being made for the railways then; and Bill, with his wonderful ingenuity, had found out the way to make a brake they wanted. Mr Stephenson had seen it,

and himself had complimented Bill. He said he had thought of something on the same principle himself, but he had not had time to work it out, and it was very clever of Bill to have done it. Some of the gentlemen of the college had collected money to patent Bill's invention for him.

At the prize-giving the rector had told it all, and made quite a pretty speech about Bill, which Bessie read out with such emphasis, and so many remarks of her own, that I could not understand it until I read it for myself. He said it was a mechanical age, and great discoveries were being made every day, and that Bill, with perseverance, if he continued as he had begun, would make a great name for himself, and be a blessing to humanity. I could not help having a little cry when I came to that, and fancied Bill listening to it.

"To think that Bill is a genius!" said Bessie, looking into the fire; "Bill that I have known all my life, and played with and teased. It just seems like a fairy tale—like Cinderella and her coach!"

"Well," says I, "Mr Orwell always said it, and we always thought him the cleverest boy in Carbeck."

"The cleverest boy in Carbeck and a genius are two very different things," answers Bessie, looking up at me with her merry eyes. Then with a little nod, and making her voice a bit gruff, like Mr

Orwell, "We're not a clever race, Mistress Martin—we're not a clever race. We'll not set Helvellyn on fire with our wit."

"Well," says I, too huffy to smile, "I hope you'll believe Bill a genius now."

"I am not so sure of *that*," replied Bessie, shaking her head. "If he is taller than me, if he has a light or three stars round his head, then I may. But if he comes back just as he went, I'll not be able to believe it; no, not even if I learn the whole of the rector's speech by heart."

"You are a very silly girl, Bessie," I say, getting a little hot; "and you do not appreciate Bill half enough."

"Well," replies Bessie, folding lightly her hands over her knees, and looking into the fire again, "I suppose it is difficult to appreciate the genius of one whom you have teased all your life."

That afternoon, at widow Troughton's, I met Mr Orwell. His face was twice as red as I had ever seen it; and he looked like the picture of Father Christmas, with the steam of his glass of grog curling round his head. He never wanted much of an excuse for a glass of grog, did Mr Orwell, and today it was a day a teetotaller might get tipsy without sin. There was quite a crowd at widow Troughton's. All the neighbours were there, and Mr Horton amongst them; you remember he was

the clerk with the wooden leg, who kept the infant boys' school. He was the only one that did not look quite pleased. His face seemed puckered-like, and his eyes peered anxiously about. He was a little envious of Bill. You see he was an authority amongst us, was Mr Horton; and to-day he felt like one of no account. Before, only Mr Orwell was looked up to more than he for his learning; but Mr Orwell was the rector, and so it was but proper. Widow Troughton looked as if she had had a good cry before we all came, but now she brimmed over with smiles. She chuckled over everything every one said. It did not require much of a joke to make her laugh.

"Well, I always said that boy had genius," said Mr Orwell, swinging his voice up and down; "and you none of you believed it. A prophet, you know, is not without honour, but in his own country. So now, fill up our glasses, Mistress Troughton, a bumper up to the brim, to the health and success of Bill."

"A bumper of water for me," says Bessie; "a bumper up to the brim to drink health and success to Bill in!"

"In whisky, or in the limpid waters of the Beck, as suits our different tastes, we'll drink to the health of the genius of Carbeck," said Mr Horton, who always said things grandly, lifting his

tumbler with a twist of his mouth that made me sad, although it was meant for a smile.

So we all drank and made a noise, and widow Troughton laughed, cried, and took snuff, and at last broke down when she tried to thank us.

"I've thought a deal about genius," said Mr Horton, in what we called his Sunday voice—it was so important and so much through his nose—slapping his wooden leg hard on the floor, and then his tumbler on the table; "and, says I, there are two kinds of genius. There's the genius as cogitates on one thing, as applies all its thoughts to it, never lets the wonders of creation interrupt his meditations: and that genius is recognised by the men of his generation. They write articles in the papers about him—they make speeches about him. Then there's the other genius who knows a deal about everything, whose thoughts are like the sand of the sea, all a-whirling in his head. That genius is not 'preciated—perhaps only by his partikler friends—perhaps not even by them."

"That's your case, Horton," says Mr Orwell over his tumbler—"a flower born to blush unseen."

There was a suppressed giggle, for Mr Horton, with his wooden leg and his stubble of a beard, that was shaved once a-week on Saturday evenings, and now it was Friday, did not much look like a flower, except, perhaps, a dusty road-side thistle.

But Bessie, who never let any one's feelings be hurt, came to the rescue at once, although her eyes were dancing with fun.

"Mr Horton," she says, "you've said quite fine things about genius; and so," nodding her head to him, and holding up her glass full of water at arm's-length above her head, "in a bumper full of the limpid waters of the Beck, I drink to the health of the unknown genius of Carbeck."

We all drank; and Mr Horton, grave as possible, put up his tumbler to his mouth, and drank all that was in it to his own health.

Every one was very merry, but I had a sort of queer feeling over me—a feeling like as if things were going to change. When I had gone down the winding path leading from my cottage to widow Troughton's—the little path Bill had gone up and down so often with Bessie—I seemed to hear the patter of their wee feet, and from behind the bushes their childish figures seemed to be peeping at me. Then I wished that they were children again. It seemed unnatural like that Bill should be a genius, and the papers writing about him.

"You seem down in the mouth," Mistress Martin," said Mr Orwell, sudden like, making me start. "What's the matter? Are ye not proud and glad?"

"Well, sir," says I, trying to laugh, "it seems so odd that there should be a genius at Carbeck. It

seems as if the place would never be like itself again."

"Whew!" cried Mr Orwell, laughing till his fat sides shook. His white neckcloth was twisted round, and the knot of it was behind his ear. "Are you afraid that a genius will attract the attention of Providence to Carbeck—an electric rod set up, and that the lightning will smite it? A heathenish notion, Mistress Martin—a very heathenish notion."

But it seemed to amuse him, for he chuckled and laughed, and repeated some verses, in Latin I suppose, to himself.

"You don't understand, sir," I replied; "cannot one be frightened at great joy?"

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW evenings after, I was busy inside the house. Bessie was outside in the garden, watering her Lent lilies and the snake-weed and balsams she was rearing, when I heard a little scream. I could not tell if it was pain, joy, or fright, and then in through the open window floated Bessie's babble.

I hurried out. Just as I had seen him the evening before he went away, with his head against the light, was Bill. The boy stood there, unchanged, awkward—no grandeur of success about him.

Bessie was walking round him, examining him curiously with her laughing eyes, pretty much as if he were a new kind of animal strayed into her garden.

"I won't believe all the fine things they say about you, Bill, if you have come back the same as you went away. You must have some sign to prove it to me. Where is it? Have you three stars over your forehead? No," giving his hair a pull, "not

one. Your hair is as rough as a pony's mane. Bill, you are a cheat. You have been humbugging them all—the rector and Mr Stephenson. Here comes auntie. Just look at him," pointing with her extended hand, "standing there exactly the same as he went; even with the same identical coat on, only a little shabbier—not even the beginning of a wing sprouting through the cloth!"

The lad was not stung or hurt at the fun she made of him, but broke into a broad, foolish smile, and tears filled his eyes.

"Nay, nay, I'm not a genius," he said, laughing softly and shaking his head.

"Yes you are!" cried Bessie, with a petulant stamp of her foot. "Every one says you are; only you don't show it. Bill, we'll—we'll put a label on you, like on auntie's cough-mixture."

For all her teasing ways of him, I looked into Bessie's eyes, and I saw there the light of pleasure and welcome I had often longed to see.

Bill was quite unchanged—very silent. I thought he was more silent when Bessie was there than when she was away. He brought a great piece of news with him. Mr George Stephenson, whom every one was talking about, had offered to take him for his pupil without a premium. Bill would pay him later, when he had made his fortune. This was the time when they were trying to get Parlia-

ment's consent to make the railway from Liverpool to Manchester. You remember nought of it. But we were mad against railways. Some said it was the devil's invention; others, that it was a craze of Mr Stephenson's—an impossibility. The coach people were right down furious, and so were the innkeepers and the gentlemen with their preserves, whose game would be frightened by the whistle of the trains. However, Parliament was considering the matter, and very soon after gave its consent. I myself did not like the thought of them. They seemed uncanny things to me. Mr Orwell, when I asked him, only gave a kind of grunt, and said, "Maybe it's the devil's idea—maybe it is not. I always say, Give the devil his head and he'll break his neck."

One evening Bessie and I were talking to Bill, in this very room, about railways.

"I don't believe in them—do ye?" said Bessie.

"I do," answered Bill, smiling in his serious way.

"You believe," she said, standing up, with excitement, "that there will be carriages with no horses to draw them—nothing but a chimney over bits of iron put down in the road, with thirty, forty, or fifty people in them, going at the rate of twelve miles an hour?"

"I believe a great deal more than that," said Bill, laughing; and, beginning to walk up and down

the room, he went on—"I see it sometimes before me, Bessie, like a grand kind of vision. I see roads going round England, with rails laid on them, and I seem to hear the whistle of the engines dragging behind, not fifty people, but hundreds and hundreds —going not at a rate of twelve miles an hour, but twenty, thirty, or forty miles. Mr Stephenson said twelve miles to Parliament, because they would have thought him mad if he had said more. They would not have listened to him. There's no end to the power of steam, Bessie. It's like a new reign come into the world. There'll be no distance in the future. The ends of the earth will meet, and the manufactures thereof pour from one into the other. It will be the knitting of the nations, and it will soon come to pass—now."

And as Bill spoke the longest speech I had ever heard from him, his face shone, and he seemed to grow tall before us.

"It's like a fairy tale: I said so," said Bessie, clasping her hands beneath her chin, and drawing in her breath—"Cinderella and her coach; and, Bill, when ye speak like that, I seem to believe that it will come true, and that you'll help to bring it about."

The lad's face flushed scarlet at her words. His grave, honest eyes met hers, all alight with faith in him, and as he looked into them, something like a sob seemed to distend his chest.

For the first time I saw a great change in him. I did not recognise him. That night he was as I had never seen him before. All his shyness, all his awkwardness, were gone. The three stars Bessie looked for seemed twinkling over his forehead! He talked, too, as I had never heard him talk—as if his tongue were loosened. He spoke about himself —about Mr Stephenson. He told us how the thought of that brake had haunted him at his studies, in his sleep; how at last he sat up nights working out the plan of it; how he had made a model of it, and felt before others approved it that he had invented what was wanted. Then came his reward in the great Mr Stephenson's praise.

"A man could carry out all his thoughts," said Bill, not looking towards Bessie, but it was easy with half an eye to see it was for her he spoke, "if the person he loved most in the world believed in him."

And for the first time, too, that night I saw a look I had long sought for in Bessie's eyes. I noticed her stealing little shy looks at Bill; and it was she who remained silent, and he who talked. When I saw all that—"Dear lad," I said, laughing in my heart to myself, "it is not only your fame, but your sweetheart you've won."

Next evening, while some neighbours were with me, Bessie came in. I thought something had hap-

pened, for she did not join in the chatter, but went and sat on the window-sill knitting quietly. She did not look sad, only as if a little shadow was over her. The after-glow was in the sky behind her head, so that it came like against a bit of dim gold.

"Auntie," she said gently, putting down her knitting in her lap, when the others were gone, "Bill has asked me to be his wife!"

"Well, and what did you say?" I asked, laughing to myself, for surely I thought Bill had been asking her this ever since she was a blessed baby.

"Well," answers Bessie, beginning to fidget with her needles and her ball of worsted—"I said I would, but by-and-by, not just yet. I hate being married. It is so solemn to marry," she went on pettishly, fidgeting with her needles more and more. "I always think people get so old when they marry. I said as when I was twenty-one I would marry him."

It seemed a grudging sort of an answer to give Bill. My heart sank at it. It was not like that I had answered my good man. Bless you! I was in the dairy when he asked me. And I thought the summer sun was shining, although it was mid-winter, and the milk was freezing in the pans. I fancy Bessie guessed I did not like her answer, for she said, as if appealing to me, looking at me with a clinging look, "You do not want me to marry just

yet, do you, auntie? You do not want me to leave you and father, and Carbeck, and go and live amongst the smoky houses, and never see the blue sky. But I'll not break Bill's heart. I'll marry him, I promise you. I'll marry him when I am twenty-one." Then beginning to laugh with tears bright in her eyes—"I'll become his gude woman then."

"Well," says I, coming near, "'tis not I would wish to see a girl in a hurry to marry, and not mind leaving her friends. But in a hurry and to keep a man waiting three years is a difference. Bill's heart is a bit of gold. But he's a man. And it's a long time for a man to be away three years from a girl and not forget her. Ye must think of that, Bessie."

Bessie began to turn her ball of worsted round and round in her lap. She hung down her head, but I saw a little smile puckering up the corners of her mouth. Presently she shot a glance of mischievous assurance at me.

"Do not have a care, aunt; Bill will not forget me," she said.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN I saw Bill next morning, his simple face was brimful of happiness. He did not seem to think Bessie's answer had been a grudging one. Every time his eyes looked towards her, they seemed to overflow with thankfulness. Everybody was glad to hear Bessie had promised to marry Bill. George gave his consent readily, but as the marriage was not to take place for a long time, the betrothal feast was to be given later.

Bill, during those days, was like a man who has found a wondrous shining treasure, which dazzles and almost confounds him with very wonderment and delight. At times, wishing to hide it from his eyes for a while, that he might make sure, by looking at it again, that it was not a dream of wealth. His joy almost frightened him. He was always putting his unworthiness against Bessie's worth. Sometimes he seemed willing to sit by Bessie and talk with her, and at the same time willing to leave her. Some yearning seized him to go wander

smiling and muttering in the fields like a silly body, telling the meadows, the woods, and the sky of his possession. He had such modest ways of loving her. He was shy with her, and yet he was always busy with her. There was a mysterious nosegay by her plate every morning. He was fond of talking at her through me, addressing me all the while, but it was easy as A B C to see it was meant for her. If she smiled or looked up suddenly at something he said, he was proud like a little lad who has hooked a shining fish.

"Have you kissed Bessie yet?" I asked, when the first day of the engagement was closing, and I had not surprised him stealing a kiss. "It's your right, lad! I should have thought you would have been as eager to kiss your sweetheart's pretty lips, as a bird to peck cherries in June."

Bill did not answer, but there came over his face the queer expression of longing and fear I had already noticed, as he looked wistfully at Bessie, making a step forward. She threw her head back with a quick blush, and looked at Bill with a sort of scared defiance. Then he came no nearer.

"Bless you, Bill," I said laughing, "one would think you are afraid Bessie would melt away if you touched her. You're more afraid of her blush than a little lad of the schoolmaster's stick."

Bill laughed awkwardly. The temptation was

strong upon him to take that kiss that was his due. He was pale, and there was the frown that always knitted his forehead, when he was thinking or feeling hard, but he respected that blush and did not draw near another step.

"Bill will kiss me when I am twenty-one!" said Bessie quickly, with another backward turn of her head, and still with that scared defiance in her eyes as she looked at him. As he did not approach, there came a gleam of fire into them, "When you cannot express a wish yourself, you must let your due wait," she cried.

Next morning, I was woke before it was dawn by some one hammering outside. What could it be? Thump, thump! it went. I could not sleep for curiosity. I was not afraid, for there are no robbers in Carbeck, so I just clapped on a petticoat and shawl, and opening my window looked out.

There was my lad Bill, putting up something, as busy as if his life depended upon its being up before cock-crow.

"What are you doing there?" I cried.

"Well," says Bill, dropping his hammer and looking shamefaced, as well he might, waking me before the larks, "this is Bessie's favourite seat. It is so unsheltered, I thought of putting up a kind of bower to prevent the wind and the sun coming to her."

"You might choose a more Christian hour," I

growled; "but get along with your work. Hammer away, I'll not mind you now. The sun might make a blackie of me, and the gale blow me to bits, before you'd make a shelter for me. But it's right the young should be loved," and I went back to bed again.

Bill worked all the morning, forgetting his breakfast; and I had to go down to the farm to prevent Bessie coming up before it was finished. In the afternoon Bill had done his work. He had formed a trellis, and made a roof that was so cunningly contrived, it could draw backwards and forwards to let the air and sunshine in at Bessie's will. He had planted round it honeysuckle, creeping roses, and clematis that he dug out of his mother's garden, and twined their branches in and out of the trellis. He deftly covered with leaves and flowers what the creepers could not yet reach, so that the arbour looked a bower of greenness all alight with sweet blossoms. The wooden bench inside he covered with fresh feather moss, and tufts of gloveflowers, blue hyacinths, and scarlet pimpernel. It was a bower fit for a queen to sit in.

When Bessie came she was delighted with it. "It must have a name!" she said, after she had walked round it several times, and examined every bit of wood, and drawn the roof backwards and forwards, and smelt every flower. "It must have

a name of its very own. What shall we call it? Aunt Martin shall say first."

I'm never good at giving a name. It scatters all my wits to be asked sudden for one. I would as like as not stumble over my own. Call it? well, call it "love's bower," I suggested after a bit.

"Oh no," said Bessie; "that's the name of every bower built for a sweetheart. There's no need to call a thing what it is."

"I should have thought," said Bill, laughing softly, "the use of a name is to call a thing what it is."

"But," said Bessie, "it must be something *very* particular, that not everybody knows."

"Let's call it, then, what is very particular to me—let's call it 'Bessie's arbour,'" said Bill, pronouncing the two last words in a voice like a river of sweetness.

"Bessie's arbour," said Bessie, meditatively, looking up at the bower with her head on one side. "I do not see the use of that either; we all know the arbour is for me."

"But you see," said Bill, persuasively, who was standing at the other side of the bower watching Bessie, "I would carve the name deep down, just over where you go in. It would bide so long as the wood, and wood lasts longer than people. And so long as it lasted, so long your name would last,

so that folk who had never seen you would know your name."

"There's something in that," said Bessie.

"People would wonder who Bessie was," continued Bill, more boldly. "They would say some lad loved her well, who built this arbour for her. They would think how beautiful she was. Maybe a poet would write a ballad on her whose name was carved in the wood."

"I should like that," said Bessie.

"Our grandchildren perhaps will sit——" began Bill, slowly.

"Grandchildren!" cried Bessie, opening wide her eyes. "How dreadful!" Then remembering that grandchildren implied children Bill's modesty had not allowed him to suggest, she blushed scarlet, and knit her straight eyebrows. "No, the name will not do at all," she said, decisively. "Now it's my turn to try. I'll sit in the bower; perhaps the name will come to me there."

Bessie entered the arbour, and sat on the mossy seat. "Oh, how nice it is!" she cried, throwing back her head, and sniffing the scent of the flowers. "Bill, it is exactly what I like. You are so clever, Bill!" and she shot a bright glance of thankfulness at him which made his chest heave with joy. She looked very beautiful under the shadow of the trellis and leaves. Her ripe brown

cheeks with the rosy colour in them; her rippling hair, ruddily radiant where the sun spots fell like kisses on it; her teeth and eyes shining brightly as she laughed.

"I've got a name at last!" she cried, starting up and clasping her hands. "I'll call it my gourd."

"Your gourd!" we cried, astonished.

"Yes, you know, like Jonah Mr Orwell preached about last Sunday, I'll have a gourd!" Bessie said, with a merry skip; "and I'll watch the Carbeck people as I sit comfortably under its shadow."

"The Lord planted the gourd for Jonah to be a shadow to deliver him out of grief," Bill said, like to himself, gazing with misty eyes lovingly in Bessie's bright face. Then, suddenly calling to mind the fate of the prophet's gourd, "Nay, nay, Bessie," he said, with a kind of apprehension in his voice, "do not call it so; for Jonah's gourd was raised and perished in a night."

"That was his fault," said Bessie, curtly, who was back again in the arbour smelling the flowers, and looking at the sky through the leaves. "I'll not let my gourd perish in a night."

"Lassie, lassie," I said, "ye must not make free with the Scriptures; there's more meaning in its words than meets the ear."

But although I scolded I could not be angry. Her merry talk was after all but like the gambols of

young things in spring. We had a bottle of cider out, and we drank to the christening of Bessie's gourd, after Bill had carved the words.

"May no wind or storm make a wreck of it; may it last like my love," said Bill, very slowly, forgetting to drink.

"Bill, you said that as if you were saying your prayers," said Bessie, laughing.

"It *is* a prayer," replied Bill. "Somehow I do not like the name; it brings a sort of ill omen to my heart. But now it's carved it must remain. And it's only my folly, I suppose," laughing uncomfortably.

"That's all it is," said Bessie, reassuringly. "I'll water the creepers morning and evening; and when the time comes I'll plant slips, so that this time next year there'll be so many leaves and flowers you'll not see the trellis-work. Next June there'll not be a leaf of my gourd withered."

Every morning, while we were still sleeping, Bill was clambering up the mountains, going leg-deep into the tarns to gather the spiked water-lilies for Bessie's arbour. He brought fresh green moss for it, and decked it with nosegays of globe-flowers, blue hyacinths, and scarlet pimpernels, that here we call the poor man's weather-glass.

Bessie would sit contentedly in it for hours, and Bill would lie at her feet.

I could not keep from laughing to hear the two talking one afternoon together, although it made me feel sad, too.

"Where shall we live?" Bill asked.

"I know where I should like to live. I should like to live up a tree, under the big green leaves. It would be a deal livelier than in the stuffy houses," replied Bessie.

"That would be pleasant in summer," said Bill, laughing softly, "but in winter it would be very cold. But, Bessie," he added, after a little pause, "I do not want you to live always in the town. I'll build you a cottage here, for you to come to when you like."

"Will you?" cried Bessie, brightly. "Oh, I am so glad! I should like a cottage on yon headland," pointing with her knitting-needle. "And I should like it to stand just where the heather stops growing. And then, you know, every time you invented something great, you would add a room to my cottage."

"That I would," said Bill.

"It would grow till it was like a fairy palace!' cried Bessie, clasping her hands, and looking towards the Coniston Old Man, as if she already saw her cottage there.

"You would like me to be great, Bessie?" Bill said.

"I'd like you to be so great that people would think you were the 'Genie of the lamp,'" replied Bessie, patly.

"Eh!" said Bill, laughing softly, "it would take a deal more than I can do to make people think that; but I think you believe in the fairies and genii as much as when you were a small bairn."

"No, not so much; but it's your fault I don't, for do you remember, Bill," said Bessie, with a little mocking laugh, "when I was a child you told me you would take me to the workshop of the fairies. And one day, do you remember, you took me, and you said I must not talk, or laugh, or make a noise, for I was going to see where the fairies made the clouds."

"Yes, I remember," said Bill, softly; "and you walked on tiptoe all the way, holding your breath."

"Yes," Bessie went on in her fresh voice, laughing; "and when I came up and saw the peaks like ghosts on every side—the mist was parting them up from the earth, so they seemed to be in the air—I thought it was quite true that this was the workshop of the fairies, and they were the blocks out of which the clouds were made, and that very soon the fairies would come, and I would see them at work. Then I got frightened, and held tight by your hand, and shut my eyes, just leaving one a tiny bit opened, just enough to peep with,—for

although I was frightened, I did so want to see the fairies."

"Yes, I remember!" said Bill again, in the same soft way. He had hold of Bessie's worsted, and he was slipping it through his fingers, and I could see him kissing it when she was not looking. The wool was to carry the kiss to Bessie's fingers.

"And when, to comfort me, Bill, you said they were not clouds, but mountains big as Helvellyn, only far away, then I cried for disappointment. Well, when you've built me my cottage I'll feel like living in a fairy tale; and when you are in London you would sometimes think of my cottage and of me in it."

"I'd think of it always, every minute of the day," said Bill, "wishing you would let me in."

"I would let you in now and then. When you were ill I would nurse you there; and I would send you down butter and cheese of my own making. Sometimes you would ask a friend to come here. They would be proud of going with you, just as you are proud of going with Mr Stephenson. The great Mr Bill—no, you would not be Bill, but Mr William Troughton. Perhaps they'd be wondering why you don't marry. Perhaps some fine lady would be wanting you to marry her. You must never let any one know you're married. So you'd take your friends with you in the coach, or in the

railway, if it's made and it's really real. And then, you know, it would be night when you come, very dark. Perhaps there would be a storm, like in the true fairy tales—rain and thunder and wind, and all the mountains echoing. Your friends would be frightened; and in the darkness, you know, just as in the true fairy tales, they'd see a light, and as they come on it would grow brighter and brighter, until they'd see it was a palace. Then you would dismount and say, 'Gentlemen, come in. This is my home. My wife will welcome you.' And I'd come down to meet you, Bill. Perhaps you would have given me a necklace of diamonds, and I—I—would——"

"What would you do to welcome me?" asked Bill, in a gentle, eager voice.

"Well, you know, there would be company. I would give you my hand, and there would be a splendid supper waiting," Bessie answered quickly, finishing her story.

"When I am old, and have made all the money we need for the palace, you'll let me in to bide with you, Bessie?"

"Oh, must we get old, like farmer Grey and his fat wife?" Bessie said, dolefully.

A look of pain, I could see, crossed over Bill's face, but he answered gently, "They're happy all the same. They love each other just as much as ever."

"Oh no, no!" cried Bessie: "he cannot love her as when she was pretty."

"He loves her just the same," answered Bill, and his words seemed to come like with difficulty, "and perhaps he is happier, for he can be more to her now. He's everything to her now: perhaps, when she was young, she had so much else, she did not reckon his love as now!"

"He does not put a nosegay by her plate every morning!" said Bessie.

"No! answered Bill, laughing with glad tenderness. "Do you like the nosegay, Bessie? I'll always put one there—all my life—I'll send you one up from London every morning to your palace —when we're married."

"Will you?" cried Bessie. Then a little wearily and with a sigh, "No, that is a fairy tale. It'll never happen. There will be no palace, no necklace of diamonds. That was all play. The reality is that—that—when I'm twenty-one, I'll become your good woman—I'll take my first step towards getting like fat Mistress Grey!" Very soon after, they came in, and I thought Bessie looked tired.

Bill was fond of telling her stories about his life in Edinburgh. When we were together, as I told you, he would address himself to me, but he was watching Bessie, so that not a look of hers escaped him. He had a slow earnest way of talking, and Bessie's

eyes sometimes wandered, and sometimes I caught her smothering a little yawn. Then Bill's voice would fail him like, and he would begin another story doubtfully, growing eager over it when Bessie paid attention.

One evening he told us the way in which he had made friends with his chum Charlie Miller.

I'll repeat the story, for it paints Bill. "He is a hunchback," said Bill, "the son of a tailor living north. I had noticed him at the class, for it is a sight to watch his eyes when he recites the poetry of the Greeks. They shine like lamps. He has not much of a body, and what he has is twisted, but he has a soul, I can tell you. Don't you think," Bill went on, looking curiously at Bessie, "it would be an odd thing if I told you, Bessie, that this crooked lad was in love? I found it out one day. A chap coming from the same village told me about it. He told me the poor lad loved a lassie, bonnie as he was awkward, and that her name was Jessie. Do you know, Bessie, it was the thought of you drew me to the lad. It made me feel for him. You see" and he laughed awkwardly, "I too am a sort of hunchback, only my hump is in my mind. I can't speak straight out, like other fellows, all I feel. So I felt for him like a kind of brother. It was you, Bessie, who brought us together."

"Was it?" said Bessie, not displeased; "and how did you show him you thought of him?"

"I'll tell you, if you like," said Bill, timidly.

"Yes, I want to hear," replied Bessie, nodding.

"Well, it came about like this. There is a big chap, all body he is, no mistake, who hated the hunchback, always trying to rile him. And one day we were coming out of the University, Charlie walking quickly with long strides, his books tucked under his arm, for he always tried to get away quickly from us straight ones. He did not like to be amongst us —it brought home to him his crookedness. That day up comes Bully, and plants himself in front of the lad, and at the top of his voice he rings out, 'I say, king's jester, croak us a ditty. Has not the witch, your grandam, taught you one? Make us laugh, corkscrew!' I saw Charlie's face quiver." Bill was speaking now without hesitating, for Bessie was all attention. Again he laughed shamefacedly as he said, "A lad does not want to be reminded he's ugly when he loves a girl. He's always minding it. The weak boy tried to get away by turning to the side of the big chap, but the other would not let him, but got in front of him. It's just wicked folly, but there was a feeling against the hunchback that always came up when one said his grandam was a witch, and many of the students began to laugh and hoot, and so—and so——" and Bill suddenly came to a stand-still.

"Well?" asked Bessie, her eyes shining with expectation.

"Well," answered Bill, plucking up heart under her look to speak of himself, "I went to where the two were standing, Bully with an ugly sneer looking down on the poor weak lad; and when I saw him looking so tall and strong, it was more than I could stand. I could not contain myself, so—so——" and Will grew confused.

"Well, what happened?" again asked Bessie.

"Well, I felt like the blood thumping in my heart, and says I, 'Let the chap pass; 'tis because you're envious of his brains ye interfere with him!'"

"The ugly bully, what did he say?" cried Bessie.

"He got red with rage, and shouted out, 'Envious of the grandson of a witch. Say it again! Hurrah! Corkscrew's got a champion!' and so, you know, what with the thought of you, Bessie, and feeling for the boy, I did not mind my words, but I cried, loud as I could, 'Yes, I say it again—and I say it's cowardly of you to taunt a lad for the body God has given him!'"

"And then?" said Bessie.

"Never mind," answered Bill, growing confused; "I think he got a lesson."

"But what was it? What did you do?" Bessie urged impatiently.

"Well!" resumed Bill, awkwardly, "no sooner had I said this than Bully hit me a blow between the eyes, crying out, 'Take this for calling me a cow-

ard.' It made me giddy and blind for a minute, and then he tried to trip me up. But you know we used to wrestle here in the green."

"Yes," said Bessie, with a proud nod, "and you were always winning the champion belt."

Bill's face brightened at Bessie's remembrance of his feats.

"Those wrestling matches did me good service. Bully was taller by head and shoulders, and strong too, for we fought. There was a crowd round us; and some cheered one, and some the other. One of the lads got up a tree and recited poetry in Greek, all the time, about battles and gods. I wish you could understand—I felt as if another soul was in me. Sometimes I thought I would be down, for Bully tried to entangle me with his long legs. The fight sometimes went one way, sometimes the other."

"But you beat him!" interrupted Bessie, drawing in her breath and clasping her hands beneath her chin, as she always did when she was excited.

"Yes," answered Bill. "Down with a thump, after a while, went Bully, beaten altogether. Then the lookers-on cheered, and I was excited, and says I to him, as he lay sprawling on the ground, 'You mock the lad again, and we'll fight it out again. If you say so much as a word or a sneer, we'll fight again.'"

"'Twas bravely done!" cried Bessie, with a catch

in her throat; and in her eyes there was the look that made me feel sure that, when she was married to Bill, and always near his brave, true heart, the love would grow that would make her be his happy wife.

"And the hunchback? Where was he? Did he see it all?" she asked, pressing her questions quickly one after the other.

"Yes, when I got up to wipe the blood and the sweat off my face, I caught a glimpse of him, standing on a mound of stones, and his eyes were shining as when he was reciting Greek."

"Did he thank you?" asked Bessie.

"Nay, he avoided me," answered Bill, shaking his head, and smiling at her disappointed face. "You see it was hard for him to have another to fight his battles. I could understand the feeling, putting myself like in his place. But, as I told you, Bessie, you had made us brothers. Some time after I noticed he did not attend college—he who never used to miss a lecture. I found out where he lodged, and went to see him. He was in bed, and there was no fire in his shabby room, although it was bitter cold. He was shaking like a rag; but he was sitting up all the same, with an old cloak over his crooked back, doing copying work. Lord, it would have puzzled the printers to have read his writing then. 'Well,' says I, making believe not to be taken aback by his looks, 'you're a pretty fellow,

to run away from your friends like that.' I had a fire made, for he could not prevent me, being in bed, and that night, and some others, I sat up with him. The poor lad wandered. He would sometimes speak of Jessie then; and, bless you! sometimes, too, the room would get full of great men and gods out of the poems he was fond of. When he got better he came to live with me. We had not much between us; but, you see, there was always my scholarship to reckon on, and one fire could cook the victuals of two and keep two bodies warm. So the boy did not need to do the copying work that hurt his chest."

"You are very good, Bill," said Bessie, smiling on him. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone softly bright, like the reflection of the stars down in the tarns. I think if Bill had tried to take a kiss then, she would not have thrown back her head. But he did not; he remained sitting where he was, almost as if he were afraid to move even a finger lest he should disturb the look of praise she was casting on him.

Just the day week of his betrothal Bill must say good-bye, and go up to London to his work.

We had a deal to talk of that last forenoon. Bill and Bessie came early in the blue morning together. There were but a few hours remaining now. We chatted at the open window, for Bessie had made

Bill come indoors to let me join in the talk. He told us all over again what he would do—how hard he meant to work. Bessie was so bright and gentle with him that morning; although he was pale with the trouble of parting, Bill had a happy face. There was all about the letters to settle. It was quite a business to send a letter then.

"I'll save up all my pence," said Bessie, darting a pretty, shy glance at him from under her eyelashes, "and one of these days I'll send you a letter all written by myself. I'll put everything in it. It will be like a newspaper."

A kind of shining dimness filled Bill's eyes when she said this. I remember all that morning I could see something weighty was on the lad's mind, as if something of importance remained still to be done, and all his thoughts wandered to it; and now the time was drawing short, he let the talk slip past him. He did not mind the questions we asked him, giving blundering answers to them. He was thinking of that something remaining to be done, fidgeting about, pulling at everything that came in his way, looking wistfully at Bessie all the while.

Suddenly he turned to me, and in a listening attitude said, "Mistress Martin, some one calls you."

"Me!" and I bustled to the door; but no one was there.

"You're mistaken," I began. Then, when I turned round, I saw Bill in that half minute had got through the important bit of business that was on his mind. I did not want to be told what it was. He was standing over Bessie, pale, excited; but there was a light trembling over his face. She was looking back surprised, offended, until she suddenly seemed to remember he had a right to do what he had done. She said nothing, but moved a step away from him. The important business was accomplished—Bill had given Bessie a kiss.

All Carbeck was at the coach-station to see Bill off. We were beginning to have it brought home to us that we had given birth to a genius. Mr Orwell was there, looking bigger than usual, as if he were swelling out with pride that his prophecies had come true. His straw hat was at the back of his head; Sancho was at his heels.

"The lad will come back too proud to know us all; yes, yes, yes, that he will—that he will," the rector kept repeating every two minutes, mopping his face with his red pocket-handkerchief.

Mr Horton was there, looking yellow and pinched, anxious to be thought a deal of too. But I think in all the crowd Bill only knew exactly where Bessie stood. It would have been kinder to have let him be alone with her those last minutes; but Carbeck did not understand those delicacies of feel-

ing. Bill shook hands right and left, or rather every one shook hands with him. He kissed only his mother and me. He shook hands with Bessie like with the rest, but he shook hands with her last of all. The touch of her fingers was the last thing he felt in Carbeck, and as he dropped them, his features contracted like with sudden pain. Then he turned and climbed to the top of the coach, by the driver's side. Bessie did not grow pale or blush when Bill held her hand; she looked shy, and moved away a step, as if she were afraid he was going to kiss her; but there were tears in her eyes, and her lips trembled when she tried to smile at him.

When the coach moved off some of the women began to sob, and the men ran up the mountain side, shouting "Hurrah!" and waving their caps. It was not in these days as now, when a journey means nothing, but coaching away a hundred miles meant then a separation, perhaps for life.

Bill did not seem to hear or see anything around him. He stooped over the side of the coach and looked at Bessie,—looked at her as if he were searching for a look in her face—the look, it may be, he had seen there once, which had made her a new Bessie—*His* Bessie, new-born for him.

CHAPTER VI.

BILL went away in June, when the lakes and the tarns were gleaming in the sunshine—when it is still spring with us, and the woods are full of Lent lilies and the ground is blue with hyacinths, so that ye might fancy the sky had come down on the earth. He was now gone three months. It was early September, and the harvest was partly reaped. Mr Orwell had got his in, and had just gone north for a holiday. He had not taken one for years, but now, he said, he must go and see his sister settled in Scotland. He did not feel so bravely as he used, and I think he went one part for love, and three parts for health's sake.

I remember well enough, it was an evening in the first week of September, and it was a fine evening. In the morning there had been a white mist, that had broken into rain enough to last any other place a month, but before sunset it got fair.

I was sitting under the porch spinning, and every

time I catch the odour of the wet creeping roses over it, that evening comes before me. There was a red sunset behind the hills—a sunset that boded no good. It was like a fierce light lowering over us, making the sky red to the east, and the very mud glowed with it.

I was wondering to myself that I had not seen Bessie. Wet or shine her head peeped in at my door or window twenty times a-day. Oftener it was a wet head than a dry head I saw, but to-day she had not been near the place.

I was thinking of that, when I saw her coming along. Bessie was a mountain lassie, and she had a mountain lassie's step, very brisk and springing. There was something happy in her walk, like that of a girl glad to live. I used to know her coming, generally, by the snatch of a ballad coming before her. Bessie liked sad songs. I would hear a pure voice, fresh like that of the thrush singing in the woods, coming nearer and nearer, making like the feel of tears come to my heart—it was so sad and sweet; when there would come a gladsome rush, the voice would stop, the door would fling open, and Bessie would fill the room with bustle.

To-night she was not singing. She was walking even quicker than usual. I watched her down in the valley, with firm strides going over the rosy muddy ground, the dark mountains with the blue

mists creeping over them behind her. I watched her coming up the hill along the path running along the bean garden close to where the mountain ashes grow all sparkling with wet green leaves and scarlet berries. She came along, and the light of the fierce, red sunset touched her too; it wrapped her round, making her face, her hair, and her white apron shine. I knew she had a bit of news to tell me, by the eager way and look of her. I knew it, before she cried out, panting for breath—

"A bit of news, auntie—a bit of the most extraordinary news."

Before she kissed me, I could see that her cheeks were a deeper pink and her eyes brighter than usual. I knew Bessie was a very pretty girl, but till to-night I thought I had never known how pretty she was. It was as if more colour and brightness had been given to her.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, looking at her, as if it was the first time I saw her.

"Nay, but ye must guess it," says Bessie, standing over me. "But ye never will. I give you three guesses."

"Why, child, what's the use of asking me to guess, if I never will guess it?" I answer, laughing. "Has widow Turrock found her hen? Has Mistress Lynn got twins? Is farmer Smith——"

"Nay, that would be no news," says Bessie, re-

proachfully, going to sit on a stool in front of me. "I mean real news. I mean something that has never happened before."

"Then I can't guess it," says I.

"Well, I'll tell you," replies Bessie, and little ripples of laughter seemed running through her voice. "A gentleman has come all the way from London to Carbeck, on purpose to make pictures of us all, and he's to begin by me, and father's letting him have the room at the top of the house to paint me in. Isn't that news?" looking triumphantly at me.

"'Tis a kind of news," I answer, not much pleased at what she told me. "What makes your father take in that man, I should like to know?"

"The gentleman," answers Bessie, "has such kind, grand ways about him. Says he to father after a bit of a talk about Carbeck and the harvest, 'Mr Lang, I feel as if I had known you all my life—as if we were quite old friends. I feel at home here.' Then he admired the view from the window, and said he would like to paint it; and says, 'The room up-stairs is just the room I want—a winter light, so cool and lasting.' He asked father, would he let him have it for a few days to paint in, and fix his own price. Then father said he might have it and welcome, but he would not let him pay for it. The gentleman pressed him to let him rent it from him, till father got a little hot, and said he did not let rooms out.

Then the gentleman begged his pardon quite humbly, and says he, 'I accept your offer, Mr Lang. I'll consider myself your guest, under great obligations to you;' and that's how it came about, auntie."

"A mighty foolish way to come about. I do not like your gentleman, with all his civil ways; stuff and nonsense! knowing you all his life! Taking your father by the soft side of him! How comes he to paint you? You're not a mountain or a tarn. Can't he let you alone?"

I was downright angry. It was so like my brother George. You need only give him some bit of flattery, and he would follow you like a horse you're leading to its stable. In the village he had the reputation of being a far-seeing man—a man of judgment. I always said it was because he scratched his head before he spoke, and made you wait a long time for his answer. I was angered, too, with Bessie sitting there right in the glow of the sunset. Her hair and forehead shining, her bright eyes all alight, her cheeks more glowing than usual—she was, after all, better worth the painting than the mountains and the tarns.

Bessie looked down, but I saw the blush rising, and the wee dimples peeping in and out about her mouth.

"The gentleman said to father, 'My friend, I paint pictures, for which I get a great deal of money.

I am painting one now, and this young lady here,' —that's me—'has just the face and figure I want. If you'll allow me, I'll make a sketch of her as a—a wood-nymp—or nymph,'" Bessie said, stumbling over the word; "and father said I would be honoured to sit for him; and to-morrow I'm to be painted, auntie; and there, I have told you all my news."

"Since I'm born I never heard more foolish news," I cried. "Bessie, just say ye can't sit. You've something better to do than to sham. You've got your poultry to look to, and your butter to make, and your washing. Fiddle-de-dee! a wood-nymph, or a young lady, indeed!"

"But I *must* sit, auntie," Bessie said, with an earnest face. "Father says as I must. I know very well I'm not a wood-nymph, or a young lady; but I must sit. There'll be all my life after for the washing and the butter."

Then she got up, kissed me, and went away with a pout.

I watched her going down as I had watched her coming up; and when she was down in the valley, I saw the tall figure of a man coming forward towards her. He was not like any of the country people about. He was walking in a lazy sort of way, with his hands in his pockets. I could not see his face; but he was tall and straight—a comely

man he seemed. I saw him take his hat off to Bessie, and then join her. She stopped, and, half turning, pointed up with her finger to my cottage. He half turned also and looked up. I knew she was asking him to come up and see me; but after a minute talking, they turned away again, and I lost sight of them—walking together towards the farm. My heart beat as I watched them, until I could see them no more. A kind of whirl and darkness came over me. My fingers got entangled in the thread.

Sometimes I think a spirit comes and warns us when danger threatens one we love. I found myself standing up, calling out to Bessie; but she was gone out of my sight, walking by that man's side. The sunset had faded away, and the wet earth and the dark hills had a desolate look over them.

I tried to comfort myself and get rid of my fears by thinking how silly it was to fancy a fine gentleman from London would notice much a little country lass like Bessie; but I had bad dreams all night. Next morning I did not feel so scared; still I made up my mind to tell George. I thought he was a fool to let a stranger in so familiar like to paint Bessie.

It was evening before I could get up to the farm. The children were at their games. They were all boys, by the second marriage. After making us wait so long for a future George Lang, Providence

was showering them down upon Carbeck. All the family was there—George smoking in his arm-chair, the copper pots and pans shining over his head. Opposite to him was his wife, with the baby in her lap, and by her side the stranger. I recognised him at the first look as the gentleman I had seen talking to Bessie the night before. Bessie was out in the yard.

"That's my sister, sir," said George, in his slow gurgle of a voice, taking his pipe out of his mouth. "Good evening, sister. This gentleman, Mr Ellis, is doing us the honour to make himself at home, and we're doing our best, in our humble way, as I call it, to make him comfortable. Bessie's sitting for her picture." And George put back his pipe and puffed away, very much pleased with his long speech.

Up jumped Mr Ellis, and took my hand I had no mind to give him, and shook it heartily.

"I'm right glad to see you, Mistress Martin. You see I know your name, although we have not met before. But I'm amongst friends here. I feel happy and comfortable, as I had known you all, all my life."

They were just the words Bessie had said. There he stood before me, a man somewhat over thirty—tall, broad-chested, with curly hair and handsome eyes, but eyes I did not like. They seemed to look straight down into your eyes, but did not let you

look into them. His manner was outspoken and pleasant, and his voice had a manly ring in it. From that very first minute there was something in him I liked and hated. I had made up my mind to take no notice of him—not to be made a fool of by his grand speeches. Now, when I refused the chair he brought me, and went and sat by George instead, I felt like a silly girl.

Mr Ellis went on talking to Sally Lang, and listening with flattering attention to what she said. The boys were screaming about him. Johnny was between his knees, and Henry was making a drum of his back; but he was as pleasant as could be. I noticed he had placed his chair so that he could look at Bessie through his eyelashes.

Bessie was taking down the linen that was drying out in the yard. Jimmy, the fourth boy, a lad of eight, was holding the basket for her. She, with her chestnut head thrown back, her round arms lifted, shining in the evening light, the wind fluttering through her dark cotton gown, looked pretty enough to excuse any man glancing at her. I can't tell if she knew Mr Ellis was watching her, but she seemed to me a mighty time taking down the linen; and in my vexation I fancied she was going on purpose from one pretty way of holding herself to another. I could hear Sally telling Mr Ellis stories about the boys—of their saucy answers, their tricks, the

way they had gone through the measles; and between the shouts in his ears, and the drummings on his back of the lads, he was listening with great attention, and nodding his head gravely.

"The illnesses of the boys can't interest the gentleman," I snapped. It all seemed such humbug, his listening to Sally's talk, I could not contain myself.

"It does. Everything interests me here," said Mr Ellis, heartily, with a laughing glance at me, as if I understood him better than any one else, and a look at Sally as if she were his dearest friend.

"So you've turned innkeeper," I said, in an angry whisper, to George, who seemed to swell out each time Mr Ellis called him friend.

"Innkeeper!" answers George, slowly, opening his eyes, and taking his pipe out of his mouth.

"Yes," I whispered again, nodding my head; "for you let a stranger as good as live in your house!"

"Does an innkeeper not get a penny-piece for what he gives? Is an innkeeper friends with the gentlefolks that bide?"

"Friends!" I interrupted, not minding George's flushed face and eyes dancing with anger, and also forgetting that Mr Ellis was listening through the boys' shouts to Sally with one ear, and to what George and I were saying with the other, and look-

ing at Bessie all the while—"Friends! it's not ye, it's for Bessie——"

I could not finish, and George was just able to relieve his feelings by a look, when Mr Ellis interrupted us. He left Sally's side, and, sitting by George, he began asking him all sorts of questions about Carbeck, and listened to all my brother said as if his lips were dropping bits of gold. George wanted, I think, to brazen it out with me, for he sat up straight, and grew wide-awake like a squirrel.

When I went away, Bessie walked with me to the gate, and Mr Ellis came too. I was scarcely civil to him, but he did not seem to see it. The stars were all shining above our heads. They seemed so faithful and trustworthy, I felt ashamed of my mistrustfulness. The full harvest moon was looking at the world over the hills, and there was a little breeze making a soft noise like the hush-a-bye with which I used to put Bessie to sleep when she was a baby. It was so light, you could see the country for miles around.

"What a fairy-like sight!" said Mr Ellis; then, in a long-drawn, sad voice he repeated—some poetry, I suppose—something about the stars singing like the cherubims.

"How bonnie!" said Bessie, softly, throwing back her head and looking up; "I'll always think of it when I see the stars."

I suppose she thought Mr Ellis was standing like her, with his chin poked up in the air. He never looked up once, although he spoke so finely. All the time he was looking hard at Bessie, whose face was all the prettier for the moonlight over it.

"Bessie," said Mr Ellis; then turning to me, "I speak to your niece as I would have spoken to mother Eve before she had that unfortunate talk with the serpent." Then, not giving me time to answer, he turned to her again, speaking playfully, as if he were talking to a little child, "Well, Bessie, do you remember yesterday, when I began your portrait, you came and peeped over my shoulder, and you said, 'How ugly!' This morning you came again, and then you said, 'How pretty!' Now I'll tell you the history of that face that you see up there in the moon,"—pointing up with his white hand, on which a big ring flashed. "Must I tell it you?"

"I know it already," said Bessie, laughing; "it's the face of the man who was stoned because he went a-sticking on a Sunday, whose face was put up there as a warning."

"It's nothing of the kind," replied Mr Ellis, never taking his eyes off Bessie's face; "it was the portrait a great artist once began of a little rustic lassie, with whom he fell desperately in love;" and Mr Ellis looked into Bessie's eyes with such mean-

ing, and she drooped her head. "Must I tell it you?" he again asked.

"Yes," said Bessie, gathering up courage again to raise her eyes to the moon.

"Well, then, my child, listen," still speaking as if he were telling a story to a little child. "It is a daub, done in the great old days. Long ago—before you were thought of, or Carbeck either—centuries ago—thousands and millions of years ago, when the earth was a huge slush—in the grand old times—nothing existed but two beings—a great artist and a rustic lass. The artist fell desperately in love with the little maiden, always looking out for her pretty face in the blue sky, for that always existed. One day he began her picture. He took his brushes; he dipped them in golden light, and he drew in her face, putting in the place for the features, just as I did yesterday; and that—that is the picture he commenced."

"Why did he not finish it?" asked Bessie, who had been listening with round-eyed wonder; then darting a mischievous glance at him through her long lashes, "was it because she said, 'How ugly'?"

"Just so; you've guessed it, Bessie," replied Mr Ellis, without moving a muscle of his face.

"It's stuff and nonsense," I began; but Mr Ellis did not let me speak. Each time I tried to interrupt him, he went on talking in a way that would

not let me find a place to put in a word. I had to stand by, helpless and listening, seeing him make strides in Bessie's good graces. Now he went on—

"She was a saucy little minx, that lassie. She had led the great genius a miserable existence for centuries, for she knew he had fallen in love with her the first minute he saw her, and she liked to make him suffer, as all women do those who love them. And so—now—when she saw how ugly her face looked after the first sitting, she resolved to play the artist a trick. She ran down and hid herself in the earth; and then something happened she had not foreseen."

"What was it?" asked Bessie, curious and puzzled.

"She stuck in the mud," said Mr Ellis. "Once in, she could not get out. But now something else happened."

Bessie's eyes had forgotten the moon, and were fixed on Mr Ellis—interested, but doubting. They were asking, "What was it?"

"All the flowers began to grow, and the trees, and the streams to gurgle, and the little birds were born—all for joy that a little rustic maiden had come to dwell amongst them, for there is nothing more beautiful than such a lassie;" and again Mr Ellis looked into Bessie's eyes. Hers drooped, and she blushed red.

"She soon forgot the genius," Mr Ellis went on, "and the blue sky, and was quite happy on the earth. The poor genius tore his hair in despair, for he could not come down on the earth without perishing, for he, being divine, would die there; and so, Bessie, to revenge himself on the lassie for having deserted him, he never rubbed out the commencement of her portrait. There it hangs up in the sky—a daub!—grinning down upon her when she looks up. Don't you see," laying his hand on Bessie's arm, "the place for the eyes, the nose, the mouth?"

"Yes," said Bessie, doubtfully, "I see; but I don't believe the story. No, I don't believe one word of it."

"It's stuff and nonsense," I interrupted; but again Mr Ellis did not let me speak. It amused him, I knew, to make me play a double part—to make me angry, and yet oblige me to listen and look. Once I thought I saw a little smile and side nod of his head in my direction as he looked at Bessie, but she was too innocent to understand.

"The lassie!" he said—"I'll tell you about her another time, and how the genius still pines for her, and inspires artists, and makes them say a good word for him to her. I'll tell you all that another day, and a great many other things. But here is

the gate. We must let my excellent friend Mistress Martin out. Good-night," shaking my stiff arm heartily; "and after I've seen this young lady home, I'll return to my miserable lowly inn by myself.

CHAPTER VII.

I MADE up my mind I would not go much to the farm so long as Mr Ellis was in it, and that I would never put my foot into the big room they now called the painting-room, until he was out of it, bag and baggage. His continual "my friending" George, and that side nod of his at me, addressed to Bessie, were too much for me. They made me feel ill with vexation.

I did not see so much of Bessie. She was being painted, like a nymph—in a white worsted kind of dress Mr Ellis had shown her how to make, which looked to me the shape of a pillow-case—so she could not come during the day, but of an evening she often came, and often Mr Ellis strolled over with her. Sometimes, also, he came by himself. I soon found out it was the nature of the man only to care for what it was difficult for him to get. Now that he saw I kept away from him, I was the one in all the village he tried most to please. He did all

he could to win me over—there was no end to his fine speeches; but I only laughed in my sleeve at them.

He was always asking me to step over and see his pictures, but I never would. Then he brought me his sketches of Bessie, for he was always sketching her, besides painting her in his big picture, some coloured, some only in pencil. Bessie feeding her chickens in the early morning; Bessie seated on an old cart-horse, going down a rutted road, under branching trees, to the Beck; Bessie in the dairy, making butter. It was always Bessie, brown-eyed, round-armed, active Bessie. Once it was Bessie listening, round-eyed, to a water-lily, placed against her ear. It was the sketch I liked best of all, although it was but a foolish one, but Mr Ellis had put into it the look that was in Bessie's eyes when she invented or listened to a fairy tale—the wonder that came bright and wistful into them. Another showed Bessie on a hay-stack, singing, with head thrown back, looking up into the starry sky. It was all dim, but on Bessie's face was a light. As she stood with her feet buried in the heap of hay, you could scarcely tell if the sketch was meant for a picture of a mortal maid, or of a wingless angel, singing afield the glad tidings on Christmas night.

If Mr Ellis brought me sketches of Bessie, Bessie, when he was not there, was always talking of him.

I kept from asking questions, but she was always bringing the talk round to him, and to his doings. If every road, you say, leads to Rome, sure, every subject led to Mr Ellis. "You never saw anything so wonderful as his pictures, or heard anything so fine as his ballads," Bessie said.

She was very merry at that time, laughing easily, frisking happily about. She was prettier, too, than I had ever seen her. There was more of a sparkle in her eyes, and a brighter colour on her cheek, but sometimes I fancied her laughter had not the airily joyous sound it used to have, just as if the sunshine had found a voice for itself. It was the same with her singing. When she came by herself to see me, she still announced her coming by a song, but the song came in snatches. They were generally new ballads she sang now. Often she would break off in the middle of a verse, and after a pause she would begin again more briskly. Perhaps her voice was softer and richer, but I missed the old bird-like freshness in it.

It was not only pictures and ballads Mr Ellis brought into Bessie's life, but he took to reading books for her, and telling her of his travels. One evening, Bessie, about ten evenings after his coming, told me Mr Ellis was reading a book called 'Paul and Virginia' aloud to them of an evening.

After she had told me as much of the story as

she yet knew, "I wished we lived in an island like that," she said, "where there were great forests, and flowers so large and brilliant. Mr Ellis says we cannot fancy them here. He says, also, it is no fairy tale—there are many islands as beautiful as the one in the book, and there are torrents that would make Breckna Force look like a tumbler emptying itself into a slop-basin. Oh, auntie, dear, I should so like to live in an island like that. There would be but two wood huts in it. I think it would be a deal cosier to live together alone. I like the neighbours, but I think one can get ever so much more out of the flowers, the woods, and the waterfalls when one is more alone. So there would just be two huts, one for father and you and me to live in together, and the other for Paul."

"Who would be Paul? Mr Ellis or Bill?" I asked, grimly.

"I was not thinking of Paul," answered Bessie, quickly, blushing the colour of a hedge-rose—"I was only thinking that it would be livelier to live all alone, with only a neighbour's hut, in the middle of a forest, where there is no pathway, and to have to ford torrents when you want to get to the other side of them, and to lose your way, and never to know if you could ever find it again, but always to go out together, so it would not signify. And then, at nights there would be such storms, you would never

know if your hut would not be blown off before morning. That is what would be exciting," said Bessie, gleefully.

"Too exciting for me!" I cried, laughing. "I am glad of a roof over my head that's not like to be spirited off in a hurry. Your fine gentleman with the white hands, and the big ring shining on his finger, and with his slow ways, would not be much of a Paul, standing in the middle of a tumbled-down hut. But Bill would build it up better and stronger each time the storm blew it down, and he would make it, like your bower, so pretty, it would look like the palace of the queen of the island."

"Yes, Bill would make it pretty," said Bessie, with a kind gleam of remembrance in her eyes. "He would be Paul; but we're not going to live in a desert island. Ah! (with a sigh) I wish everybody and everything were like what they are in ballads and books."

"I am glad they are not, lassie; but maybe that's because I am getting old," I answered.

"Nay, not because you're getting old, but because you are such a wise, sensible auntie. Mr Ellis says if you have one fault, it is that you are *too* sensible; but I said you had not a fault, and that you were like my very own mother to me," said Bessie, coming closer, and nestling her head down on my knee.

Then she went on, after a pause: "If you only knew all the beautiful ballads Mr Ellis sings; some of his own making. They most are sad. They're about girls and their lovers; and sometimes they run away together, sometimes they are killed, and sometimes one dies of grief for the other's not being faithful. But it's not like that in real life."

"I am very glad it's not," I cried out, not being able to keep myself from smiling at her doleful tone.

"And then Mr Ellis tells such stories of the countries he has seen," Bessie went on, sitting upright now, her eyes, her hair, her round throat shining in the firelight. "They are more wonderful than the fairy stories that never happened. Yesterday he told me of a city where there are no streets, no waggons, no horses, nothing but water; and everybody goes about in boats, and everybody sings as their oars splash in the water; and the houses are all palaces, and they are all reflected down in the water-streets. Then there's a cave, he told me —a cave that is all blue. Its walls are blue; the sea makes a blue floor to it; even the pebbles down at the bottom of the waves are blue, and the fishes also, and beautiful plants that grow in the sea, they all look blue. It must be like going into a cave in the sky; but Mr Ellis says it is on earth, and he has seen it. Oh, I should so like to see the sea!" said Bessie, clasping her hands.

"I doubt if the sea can be finer than the lake," said I; "and I do not like them as are always running down their country for others, and think things are finer because they're far away. But who knows, honey?—perhaps when the railway Bill's helping to make is finished, he may take you and show you the sea, and maybe that blue cave you speak of. Have you heard from Bill lately?"

"Nay, he writes but once a-month, and the time is not come yet," said Bessie.

"And you, have you written to him?" I asked.

"My letter is not finished yet," replied Bessie. "It takes such a time to form the letters neatly, and to put all the words together. If you only saw Mr Ellis writing! He wrote a song inside the copy-book he made me a present of the other day, where he says he'll write down for me all the ballads I'm to learn by heart, and his pen went as fast as my knitting needles. But it's true," added Bessie, with a shy laugh, "when he had finished I could not read what he had put down, so he took a separate bit of paper and wrote it all over again, making the letters like those in books, and now I can read it quite plain. And he put a picture all round it, so the words seem to be peeping out of the leaves of the trees. And," Bessie went on, with half roguish, half bashful triumph, "he wrote the

song on purpose for me. He wrote it out of his own head; and if you like I'll show it to you, for I've brought it in my pocket."

Without waiting for my permission, Bessie drew something out of her pocket, carefully wrapped in a clean pocket-handkerchief. When she undid the covering I saw a little copy-book bound in blue cloth, with red-edged pages. It was the book Mr Ellis had given her, and which was to be filled later on with ballads. There was only the first page or two written on now, and they were scrawled over with writing I could no more read than Bessie could. From some leaves further on, where it lay to be kept flat, Bessie drew out something also wrapped up, this time it was with tissue paper. She unfolded it with great care, scarcely touching it with the tips of her fingers, then she handed it to me, still holding the top of the page with a corner of the tissue paper.

I saw some verses written, as Bessie had said, in neat, small letters, like printed ones; round it trees enfolded their branches, and some of their leaves fell across the words. The moon, in a purple sky, seemed to be sleeping above the song; below lay the lake, with the mountain about it, all bathed in the moonlight. The song and the painting are still in the copy-book—you may see them, if you like.

Bessie kept watching me with a face of coy delight as I read:—

"Lay thy sun-burnt hand in mine,
Maiden slender as a pine;
'Tis the night, the moon is gleaming
O'er the stream 'mid rushes dreaming.

Ah! yon town of fitful change
Lies behind your mountain range;
I'll forget its empty clamour
In this night's most holy glamour.

As an idyll life would be,
If its days were spent near thee,
Its thoughts and actions passing fine,
Were thy sun-burnt hand in mine.

Why this sob in the brooklet's song
As it blindly steals along?
Why that shadow o'er the moon?
Maiden, guess it not too soon."

"Is it not pretty?" asked Bessie, proudly, when I had finished.

"I don't see any beauty in it," I answered; "and what's more, I cannot make head or tail of it. Do you understand it?"

"Not quite, especially not the last verse; and I don't like to ask Mr Ellis lest he might think me but silly, and not write me any more," answered Bessie, hanging her head. "But when he gave it me, Mr Ellis said I would be sure to guess his meaning later."

"I would not try to guess it," I answered anxiously. "I take it there's never much meaning in things that are so cunningly twisted, and are as difficult to guess as a riddle. They're no more worth finding out than bad walnuts are worth the cracking and the peeling. If a man cannot say a thing right out plain, it's because he has not the meaning of it plain in his own heart, and he's trusting to his fine words to make a show of a meaning."

"I know there's a deal of meaning in the verses," said Bessie, with a pout, taking back the page and stroking the writing and the painting gently. "There's a heap of pretty things it is hard to understand. Most of the verses in the Bible I cannot understand. Maybe it's not for the like of me to understand them, no more than to soar to the blue sky."

"'Tis not right, lassie," I said severely, "to mention in the same breath the verses in Scripture and those by Mr Ellis."

Bessie flushed scarlet, and once more she hung her head. After a pause, she began again, still looking down on the painted page.

"I know there's a deal in the verses, and the painting is just like the night, all blue with a big gold moon in the sky. Mr Ellis wanted to see the country by moonlight, and father sent me and Johnny with him. And Mr Ellis told us fairy tales, and I

thought I saw the fairies skipping round the trees, he spake so softly as if he believed in them himself. It was all so lovely, more lovely than I had ever seen it. And we went to Breckna Force, and saw the moon shining on the waterfall. Mr Ellis said, the white of the foam minded him of the white of the Transfiguration. And then we went up the Beck to where it's no bigger than a baby stream, and we plucked blackberries in the moonlight and sang, and next morning Mr Ellis wrote me that poem."

"When is he going?" I asked abruptly. "He's been here ten days. Who wants him longer? The neighbours are all noticing his stay."

"Going! oh, he's not going yet!" said Bessie, looking up with a sudden scared face.

Then she paused, gazing in front of her as if she were seeing before her something very sad.

"Father's been so happy since he's come," she said, softly, almost under her breath; and immediately after she got up and went away.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not exactly true, what I said about the neighbours. They did notice Mr Ellis, but he was popular with them. They thought great things of him. His pleasant ways took with the simple folk. He listened to all they had to say. He took the greatest interest in their ailments and in the state of the crops. He also had a word of flattery for each, and it was just the word each liked best. He told Mr Horton the way he said 'amen' was grand, it made the service impressive. It was like an organ note —"blown through his nose," he added to us, when Mr Horton was out of hearing. But if he laughed at the good people, he never let them see it.

Then his paintings excited such wonder! and he was always painting. He painted the mill; the sun shining over the wheel and the white foam, and dotting with light the grey house with its red roof and bright patches of lichen and moss. When miller Torrax saw his house and his good wheel painted there

before him, he was like a lover looking on the face of his sweetheart. He put on his spectacles, and gazed at it with a broad tremulous smile. He recognised every round bit of moss on the tiles; and the chimneys. "Hey dear! it only wants the sound of the water and the whirr of the wheel to make it living!" cried the miller. Mr Ellis gave him that picture after he had painted one from it for himself, where he put in Bessie. And miller Torrax hung it over his chimney corner, where you may still see it, and all the time he smoked his pipe of an evening his eyes would be fixed on the picture of his mill.

Then farmer Smith came one morning and humbly asked Mr Ellis to paint his farm, and would he put in his picture the ducks in the pond. And Mr Ellis went over that very day and painted the house and painted every one of the ducks, and the old man was so delighted, he almost wept for joy over them, and on the eve of Michaelmas day, he killed his fattest goose and brought it to Mr Ellis. Then came Jim Torrax rowing home in his fishing smack—the boat that had won the race on Windermere Lake, that lads of all the country side rowed against each other every year. And Mr Ellis painted her too, moored in the Beck on the pebbly shore, and he painted her anchor, the stout rope that tied her, and the white letters in which her name "Mary Ann' was written, for she was called after Jim's sweetheart. And Jim at sight

of the picture clasped his hands. "I could worship her!" he cried, and Mr Ellis laughed and gave it him, and Jim hung it over his bed. Then came the mothers bringing their children to him to be painted. The good souls thought he was a kind of god, to be able to set down the pretty faces of their little ones on paper like that.

The simple folk were always singing their wonder of his doings, and George strutted about like a fat chanticleer, proud of being Mr Ellis's friend and host —for although Mr Ellis slept at the "Good Man," he spent the better part of his day at the farm, painting up-stairs. What he did out of doors were only rough sketches, he said.

I think in all the village I alone kept my head pretty cool about him. You should have heard with what fine speeches he tried to dazzle me. "My butter was the best in Carbeck;" "My cheeses were fit to be laid on the King's table." Or he would speak to me confidentially, calling me his friend. He said he respected my understanding. He could see I was "the widow of a scholar and a gentleman." This last speech he made sure would win me, but it did not.

Yet, although I mistrusted him, I felt there was much that was taking in the man. He was so different from us country folk. The way he held himself, his white hands, his voice, were different. His

daring was attractive. His handsome young face had a worn look; there were lines on it that made the old people here look like children who had put on wrinkles and grey hair.

When he found flattery would not blind me to him, he made a sort of confidant of me. He spoke to me like one equal to him in intellect. I remember one thing he said, for afterwards he wrote verses on it, which you'll find in the blue book, and I think of it against my will when I read the first chapter of Genesis, so that I've given up reading it. He was lying, one day, full length on the grass, and I was spinning. "Mrs Martin," says he, "I like this place. I like the homely, pleasant people who live here. Their humble faces light and shade so easily. Their lives are bounded by such near horizons. They know anxiety only for harvest and cattle, and they know no sorrow but that for death. I like their simple admiration of my daubs. Their chatter goes to my heart like a child's prattle. Do you know, sometimes a queer fancy takes me. I fancy I have come across the race of man as it was before the fall. Do not start; let me dream my heresies aloud to you. Their little envies might become gigantic discords; their innocent toying with love, passion, if only one of them deliberately sinned against the sense of God's command." Then he went on to say something about Adam not being the first

man, but the first poet. He was the one in whom all the germs of the earthy and god-like instincts were ripe. He could express the glory of the two natures in him, so that the wonder-stricken people about him said, "He walked with God!" Then, having revealed their souls and God to them, he committed some act that initiated them into the passions of the flesh. For the first time the innocent creatures knew good from evil. "But, Mrs Martin," continued Mr Ellis, "I confess, when I am alone, and think of those good, fussy souls, so busy with trivial interests, so ignorant of their own natures, I laugh till the mountains echo. The world before the fall was a child's big nursery."

I told him I did not understand a word of what he said, and I doubted whether it would not require a wiser head even than the rector's to understand it. Maybe a head grown silly over its own vagaries. I told him if he did not think Carbeck better than a child's nursery, I wondered he bided there so long, he who was a full-grown man.

"Now, I've angered you, Mrs Martin," he said. "I tell you, this place is delightful. I feel as if I could never leave it. I should like to go back a thousand centuries and live and die here. I *wish* I could. Sometimes," he went on, after a pause, "I want to go away. I feel I would return to my old haunts a wiser and a better man for this peep into

innocent existence. But I cannot pluck up heart to go yet. I am bound here as with hoops of steel."

I did not answer him. I knew well what kept him here. It was Bessie, winsome and fanciful.

After a while, Mr Ellis resumed, slowly, keeping his voice smoothly under command, but eyeing me slyly all the while under his eyelashes, "I think, Mrs Martin, the hour of ripeness is very near attained. You are miles removed from the good folk about you, not only by your own natural intelligence, but, if you will allow me to say so, by the years of companionship with the scholar whose books are there," pointing to the house. "And now," hesitating a little, "your niece, Bessie, has a spark of the poet-soul in her."

"Sir," I said, hotly, "if by the poet-soul in her you mean Bessie is more likely to be tempted than the others, she's not the girl I take her for if she ever sets an ill example to the Carbeck lasses."

As I said this, we heard, before we could see her, Bessie's voice thrilling out —

> "I've been roaming, I've been roaming,
> Where the meadow dew is sweet,
> And like a queen I'm coming
> With its pearls upon my feet."

"Ill example!" exclaimed Mr Ellis, springing up, after he had listened to her for a minute. "Her very voice would scare evil away."

Then he went to meet her, his deep tones joining in her song. Soon they came up together, and Bessie looked radiant like a rose on which the sunshine is lying.

With her Mr Ellis's manner was paternal and caressing. He was always minding her. He told her her faults quite frankly. He was always correcting her pronunciation. "Your pretty lips must talk pretty English," he would say, and after a while her speech became different from ours. He was always minding her. He entered into all the little troubles and interests of her life. The illness of her pet heifer deeply concerned him. When her favourite kitten strayed away he hunted in every house in Carbeck for it, and none could look prouder or gladder than he, bringing it home in his arms, having found it curled up asleep in farmer Smith's stable. He had a droll way of noticing the habits of the animals, and drawing their characters.

"Mrs Martin," said he, one evening when he and Bessie had strolled over to see me, "I've spent two delicious hours in a hay-stack. I've been watching Bessie's chickens. I've studied their habits. I've grown familiar with them. There's a delightful grey speckled hen, who comes and goes, and struts about all day long, as busy as a village gossip. She's a good-natured soul, but of a prying disposition. I'll answer she's up to the scandal of the hen-house.

The black hen is decidedly ill-grained. How she ruffles her rusty feathers, and cackles peevishly! She's always too late for the tit-bits. That lively creature, the grey hen, snaps them up from under her very beak. Don't tell him, but the black hen always reminds me of that wizened-faced creature Horton, every time I look at her. As for that dowdy white fowl, that sits all day on the top of the dunghill, never budging, she's an old maid. She's been crossed in love, and ever since her life has been a long moult. I'll be bound she never laid an egg."

"That large egg you said, this afternoon, was the best you had ever tasted, was laid by her," said Bessie, merrily, nodding her head at him.

"I don't believe it," said Mr Ellis, solemnly. "I believe it's that good-natured speckled hen that laid it, and passed it on to her for appearance's sake."

"She was laying it, and I waited and took it out, warm, from her nest," cried Bessie, frisking triumphantly about. "And, now, you must ask her pardon to-morrow."

"I shall," replied Mr Ellis, cordially. "I'll make my apology to her to-morrow, as she stands on one leg on her dunghill, waiting for her fate, which will be to be boiled down into a cup of greaseless soup for an invalid."

Another day it was the kittens' turn. "I'm going on with my studies, Mrs Martin. Bessie's kittens

furnish me with matter for them, and the result of my observations is still that grey is the colour of the best of the animal species. The black kitten is decidedly the cleverest, but he is wicked. He has a dash of Beelzebub in him. The white is good, but horribly stupid. The grey is a pleasant mixture of geniality and caution, friendliness, and a due appreciation of his own comfort. His shrewdness prevents him from obtruding his presence on your knees, when not agreeable. There is a sympathetic rumble in his purr that is absent in the other two. The purr of the black kitten is only selfish satisfaction; that of the white is a snore. I respect that grey kitten. He has a well-balanced disposition. I have made a vow never to be without a grey cat for the remainder of my years."

Then he would notice the beautiful things we had grown so accustomed to we did not mind any more than we did the dawn or sunset, and he brought their beauty home to us. "That delicious pool just behind the barn," he would say, "I could spend hours watching it. I could write a book on a pool; a picture would never do it justice. That stagnant water, fast asleep; those dreamy water-lilies, floating on their leaves. That duckweed, that absorbs all the impurities, and that looks like meshes of green hair. Maybe, Bessie, it's the locks of the nixies who bide in the pool. Then that occasional

burst of colour round the rim. The white water-elder, and purple mallow, blue forget-me-nots, and tufts of the violet marsh pimpernel. Then those green flies, that look all legs, that lie on the surface of the water, and dart about in zig-zags; and that clumsy water-beetle, with a sort of snort, that rises every now and then to the surface. It is all too delicious! There is an attraction that is almost melancholy to me in watching that lovely piece of water, and its mysterious pool-life."

"I like the water-lilies," said Bessie, in a tone of gentle dreaminess that sometimes came across her usually merry voice; "but I never thought of the duckweed as pretty. I think the water-lilies look like stars that have fallen, and were turned to flowers soon as they touched the water, and now they keep looking up to the sky, wishing they could get back again."

"That child is a poet," said Mr Ellis, in his emphatic way. "All true poets are children. They look on nature simply, and tell out strongly what they feel."

"You must not turn Bessie's head. Her fancies are but childish, and would not make much of a poet," I said.

"You do not appreciate her," said Mr Ellis, in a half-playful, half-serious tone, looking at Bessie, who blushed rosily. "And, Bessie, now that I

come to think of it," he went on, "the story of the 'Sleeping Beauty' is a true story, only the beauty is still lying fast asleep at the bottom of the pool."

"Is she?" said Bessie, opening wide her eyes, and showing more plainly the mocking and wistful elf that dwelt in them.

"Yes," said Mr Ellis, "and I'll write the story of it for you."

Very soon after there came more verses, written inside the blue copy-book, in printed letters, with a picture about them of the pool with the water-lilies, and the duckweed on it, and the scant rushes standing up in it.

"Here they are, you may read them for yourself," said Mistress Martin, handing me the stained, dimmed book. I copied the verses that night, and I insert them here. They were headed—

THE SLEEPING POOL.

"A spirit sleeps in the depths below,
  Her sleep is deep as a spell;
Hushed is the ripple's ebb and flow
  Since the heavy twilight fell.
Asleep in every watery fold,
  Fish and nixie, rat and stoat,
Green-haired sprites the lily-cups hold
  On sleeping hands, and dreaming float.
And all the flowers around the rim,
  Open-eyed, who seek to peep
Into the purple mystery dim,
  Grow languid, too, and sleep.

There's a sleeping spirit, I deem,
  Foam-white like the lilies above,
In whose heart hides a golden dream,
  At its inmost core of love.

On the iris wings of the south,
  As the fairies foretell, one day
One will come who will kiss her sweet mouth,
  And shatter the spell away.
There's a quiver of lilies and leaves,
  A gleam as of waking eyes,
Shy with the wonder their dreaming weaves,
  And a stir, as of happy sighs.
Is he come who will loosen her heart
  From its coil of stagnant sleep?
Is he come who will make life to start,
  And the fire of love to leap?
'Tis only the west wind's glowing feet,
  Gliding o'er lilies and rushes;
And the spirit stirs in her sleep,
  And under a dream-kiss blushes."

Often, resumed Dame Martin, of an evening, when I passed by the farm, I heard Mr Ellis's voice reading aloud or singing. Sometimes Bessie's voice was mingling with his. If I entered, I would see George sitting in his arm-chair under the porch, puffing slowly at his pipe, and Sally a little way off, with baby on her lap, sewing or knitting. The boys would be listening also, some sitting on the ground, some standing about, their toys in their hands; farther off would be groups of maids and farm-lads. Bessie would be sitting near Mr Ellis;

often she would be peeping over his shoulder on the book. But I seldom went in to disturb them.

George and Sally, and all the village folk, felt Mr Ellis's power of making their dull lives variegated; as for Bessie, her days were becoming many-tinted like the rainbow.

No one found aught to say against her being so much with Mr Ellis. No one saw danger in it for her. Was she not betrothed to Bill? and to be betrothed was only next to being married for solemnity. I had a vague fear, but I could not put it into words. I could not grasp that I was really afraid that Bessie, who had passed her word to Bill, was beginning to care for Mr Ellis. I could not have said it to any one.

As for Bessie, I do not think she had any thought or fear in her heart. I feel sure if I could have looked into it I would have seen she thought of her betrothal to Bill as "real life," sure to end in marriage, and of Mr Ellis's stay amongst them as what she read of in books and ballads.

CHAPTER IX.

One day Bessie came in and said Mr Ellis was away in the mountains painting what he called "his academy picture." That was the picture where Bessie was painted like a nymph, all alone in a wood; he was putting the background from nature. "The house seems quite empty without it," said Bessie, ruefully; "and he says he wants to surprise us all. We have seen nothing yet; he can do only bits of rough sketches, so he won't let any of us see his picture until it is quite finished now."

"And I'm sure I don't want to look," I said.

Bessie did not speak for a while; then she began, with a little tremulous grievance in her voice, "I do not know, auntie, why you have so hardened your heart against the picture. It is the bonniest——"

"I've not hardened my heart against the picture," I interrupted, a bit snappishly. "It's no care of

mine if Mr Ellis paints everything from the geese to Helvellyn, all round. But how you can stand for him in that gown you showed me, that has no more shape, to my thinking, than one of miller Torrax's bags, with holes for your arms,—that's what passes me."

"Mr Ellis says it's the way the most beautiful women dressed hundreds of years ago, in a country —I don't remember the name," replied Bessie, pausing in her knitting to think of it.

"I do not know who the most beautiful women were," I cried; "I'm but thankful I am a Christian woman, wearing a Christian gown one need not mind going out all weathers in, wind or calm, with decent strings and hooks and eyes to it, and a shape of its own hiding mine."

"I wonder where the picture is? Sure he will not leave it in the mountains," said Bessie, not listening to me.

As it was no use my telling her I did not care where it was, I did not answer.

Bessie was very curious to know where the picture was. She kept asking Mr Ellis to tell her, and slyly watching to see which way he went; but he put her off the scent.

"It's with the king of the gnomes," he said, mysteriously. "I go down into the kingdom under the mountains to paint. When the picture is finished

I'll bring it up to the light again; and then I'll astonish you—you'll see what I can do."

"Oh, I wish you would tell me where it is!" cried Bessie, clasping her hands.

"It's there, underground," repeated Mr Ellis, pointing with his fingers to the earth. "And it's not only you, it's all the world I'll astonish, when it's done." Then he said, mournfully, "They cut me up horribly in the papers last year. I almost lost faith in myself. I was nearly throwing all my sketches out of the window, and sticking my knife into all my canvases. That was but the first miserable moment," he added, cheerily. "I was soon a man again, and resolved to paint the best picture of the year."

Then there came a pause. At last Bessie said, very timidly, "Don't you remember you said to me the other day all the great men were abused, and often not known during their lives. You should think of that, and not mind when they say ill things of your pictures——" Here her voice failed, and she blushed.

"Bessie," said Mr Ellis, harshly, looking queer and angry, "I ought to go away. I must go."

"Go! before the picture is finished!" exclaimed Bessie, her eyes filling with tears.

"Yes, I ought to go," said Mr Ellis. But he did not go. He remained; and Bessie watched, won-

dering where the picture was. Mr Ellis never appeared now till afternoon at the farm.

One morning she ran in, the bloom of her cheeks and the brightness in her eyes heightened with excitement. "Auntie, I'm sure it's at farmer Smith's," she cried, almost before opening the door of the dairy.

"And I do not care so much as a knitting-needle where it is," I answered, not pausing in my churning.

"I've three times seen Mr Ellis coming out from there, and this morning I saw him go in; and I waited to see how long he'd bide there, but he did not come out. I asked the boys, but they did not know about the picture, I am sure. It's all kept a secret. Then I found out farmer Smith; he ran away quite scared, like mortally afraid the secret would slip out, so I know the picture's there!" she cried, skipping about.

She told Mr Ellis; but he only said, in that serious way that puzzled her, "You're an inquisitive little puss. You know nothing about it. I'll tell you nothing till the picture is painted. It's down below, in the bowels of the earth. The king of the gnomes is taking care of it for me."

After his morning's retirement Mr Ellis spent the rest of the day at the farm painting or lolling

among the haystacks chatting with Bessie. Sometimes he came to pay me a visit.

I soon perceived he was beginning to have an uneasy jealousy of Bill. It amused me to see how transparent the clever man was on this point.

When he was alone with me he would bring the talk round to the lad. He inquired about his height, his complexion. Was his manner sprightly? Was he quick of speech? He spoke slightingly of his canniness, upon which I had most to say.

"Oh, yes! a handy mechanic," he would answer, dismissing the subject and letting the talk drop. Then he would begin again cautiously, "You think they are much attached to each other?"

"They have been sweethearts since they were children," I replied.

"That does not always mean love," he remarked, sharply; "but you think this affection is rooted—is part of her very life."

"Bessie has passed her word to Bill," I replied, aggravated by his cross-questionings. "I do not know what that means in your parts, but here it is held to be for life, as much as if the parson had bound the two in marriage."

"Hum!" was all Mr Ellis said, but I thought his colour changed, whether to white or red I could not tell, it was such a quick flash that passed over his quiet face.

That very evening he set to work to make Bessie think less of Bill. As they were standing in the poultry-yard together, chatting away, I heard him say—

"Now, come, tell me something of your sweetheart. He's a tall fellow, I suppose. I hope he's like King Saul, towering head and shoulders over the surrounding natives. It's but right he should appear their king, for you are the queen of the lassies."

"No, Bill is not tall," replied Bessie, innocently. "I am taller than he."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr Ellis, in a tone of consternation. Then there came a pause, until Mr Ellis said, brightly, "It's his wit then! you're such a greedy lassie for stories. I suppose he's always spinning some pretty yarn for you, or may be he's a bit of a rustic poet, and can turn a verse. Of course you don't care for his canniness at mending bolts and boots. Bill's not silent, like the young dolts about here, who seem to be in mortal terror of their own voices. He tells you fairy tales by the hour."

"No; Bill talks very little. He talks less than the lads about. He never told me a fairy tale in his life," replied Bessie, laughing, but there was a vexed ripple in her laughter.

"Good gracious! short and heavy!" slowly ejaculated Mr Ellis, removing his cigar from his mouth

and facing Bessie. "Then, why in the world—— But I beg your pardon. I must not finish what I was going to say."

"It does not signify what a lad's looks are, or his few words, if he's true, and has a good heart," said Bessie, tremulously, looking away.

"No, of course not," replied Mr Ellis, stiffly.

"Bill is very good," resumed Bessie, more fluently. "He's the best lad in the village, he's so steady and so canny. He——" But here her voice failed under the chill of Mr Ellis's silence.

At last Mr Ellis said, slowly and sadly, "I had always pictured Bill different from the other lads. I never could have thought you would have fancied a stumpy man, who had nothing to say for himself."

"Bill has plenty to say when he likes, and he's not stumpy," cried Bessie, with fire, turning round and running into the house, leaving Mr Ellis standing by himself in the yard. I saw her face was flushed up to the roots of her hair as she passed me.

"He's only speaking so to disparage the lad," I said. "He had found out from me all his looks and ways."

Bessie, standing with one hand on the door-latch, at the other side of the kitchen, snapped angrily at a tear with her other hand.

"I wish Bill talked more and was taller," she said, and opening the door, she plunged out, slamming it after her.

This was their first quarrel, but after that evening they were constantly bickering and squabbling. The conversation would begin quite amicably between them, then it would be sure to hit on some turn that would lead to Bill, Mr Ellis generally making some slighting allusion to him that Bessie would take up at once. It gladdened me to see how leal she was to him. She eagerly upheld his goodness, never giving in to any disparagement of him. I had not known before she appreciated him so well; but I had an uncomfortable feeling love would not give such good reasons for itself. It sometimes struck me as if, in her eager talk of Bill's worth, one word was addressed to Mr Ellis, and two were unconsciously addressed to herself.

Thus, one late afternoon, Mr Ellis was painting Bessie out in the fields. She was perched up in an old willow tree. A basket was hung on her left arm, out of which she was scattering crumbs among the chickens, ducks, and geese assembled round the foot of the tree.

She made a quaint picture. A scarlet hood was on her head, and the grey branches of the willow forked out on either side of her. A bright sunset cloud spread behind her, and the twilight fell over

the hay-stacks, the pool, and the red-tiled farm-house.

Mr Ellis was sitting with his back against a hay-stack, his easel before him, painting Bessie feeding the fowls. In the distance you could see files of white geese solemnly waddling towards the willow.

I kept to the promise I had made myself not to look at his pictures of my own free will, so I stayed away, sitting on the other side of the hay-stack, near Sally, who always had a deal to say about the boys, and the baby's new acquirements, and who salted her talk with repeating Mr Ellis's compliments to her on her children and her housekeeping. Some way off George was watching the men ploughing, while the boys played about him.

Mr Ellis was teaching Bessie, as he painted her, a ballad about "Young Lochinvar." He made her repeat it quite prettily, as usual carefully correcting her pronunciation as she went along. First, I could hear his strong, clear voice coming from behind the hay-stack, giving out a line or two of the poem; then came Bessie's hesitating, rather plaintive tone, repeating after him obediently, like a little child at her lessons. Often she forgot the ducks and geese, who cackled crustily, to remind her of their presence.

"Why, Bessie, you nearly know it!" said Mr Ellis, at last, kindly. "What a quick learner you are. I declare I would have taken longer to learn

it myself. Now we've done with lessons, let's have a talk. But sit still; I've not done with you yet. It's too lovely, this twilight effect, and the bit of red against the grey branches. You look as weird and dainty, Bessie, as if you were the soul of the tree peeping out on us, in a mortal lassie's dress. Come, now, what do you think of the ballad?"

"I think it delightful," cried Bessie. "I'm so glad she escaped from the ugly old bridegroom with handsome young Lochinvar."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mr Ellis, laughing, "I imagined you would be shocked at a lassie who, on her wedding day, galloped off on the steed of a warrior her father did not approve of."

"Oh yes, in real life," said Bessie, hesitatingly, "but this is a poem."

"Which means, it never happened," said Mr Ellis; "but it did happen, and a great many more startling things than that happen every day in what you call real life. Child, do you think the whole world's 'real life' consists of baking, brewing, milking cows, ploughing, sowing, reaping, making love to the right sweetheart, marrying the right wife, having a number of good children, then dying and waiting restfully under a decent headstone for the last day of judgment?"

"I know you think us very stupid. I wonder you care to bide with us," replied Bessie, in an

aggrieved voice, that trembled a little, throwing as she spoke a big handful of crumbs to the fowls.

"Stupid! Heaven forbid I should think you stupid. I only meant, my child, it is not out of the good, innocent lives led here that ballads are made."

"I don't see why it's only the wicked folk that are to have ballads written on them," cried Bessie, casting another vexed handful of bread to the geese and ducks, who pecked and screamed and fluttered excitedly about.

"Wicked folk! What do you know of wickedness? Where did you learn of it? When? Where?" said Mr Ellis, laughing. "Come now for your idea of wickedness? For lads, a drop too much on Hallows' Eve and New Year's Eve. For lassies, stray thoughts of their sweethearts at church, when the parson's reading out the long names in the first lesson."

"Wickedness is more than that, although it is not right to take a drop too much, and lassies ought to keep their thoughts on what the clergyman is saying," said Bessie, solemnly, from among the branches.

"Well, then since wickedness is more than that, tell us what it is. Nay, Bessie, you know better what is goodness. Out with it, child—what is goodness?"

"Goodness!" Bessie began bravely, then she came to a standstill. "Goodness!" she repeated, beginning to stumble; and now a new regiment of geese

joined the old ones, and there was a louder confusion and cackle below. "Goodness," at last said Bessie slowly above the hubbub, "is never to do what you know you ought not to, and always say your prayers and never tell a falsehood."

"An excellent definition, child, like an answer in the catechism. A desperately difficult saying put into simple words. Now, Bessie, did you ever know one who was good according to your putting? I suppose" (sneeringly) "Bill is good."

"Yes, Bill is very good," answered Bessie, gravely, throwing out the bread slowly, crumb by crumb, to the fowls.

"Not a flaw to be found in him anywhere. Honest rustic, works hard the six days of the week, and goes to church on the seventh, carrying his prayer-book in his pocket-handkerchief, and giving his arm to his mother."

"Bill gives his arm to his mother, but he does not carry his prayer-book in his pocket-handkerchief," said Bessie, petulantly throwing out the crumbs, now in a shower, amongst the excited poultry. "He is a good son,—the best in Carbeck. There never was a better one. All the people say so."

"And he's a good lover," interrupted Mr Ellis.

"I was not going to say that," said Bessie, tossing the basket down amongst the ducks and geese. "I was saying there never was a steadier lad—never—

or one more canny and hard-working, never taking a drop too much, or——"

"My dear child," said Mr Ellis, scornfully, "to praise Bill for such conduct is like patting Adam on the back for his behaviour in Paradise before he ate of the tree of knowledge."

"I do not know what you mean about Adam," replied Bessie, hurriedly, in a voice that seemed to gather tears as it went on, "but I know about Bill —that he is very good. I keep thinking of his goodness and of his kind ways to me and to his mother. I *make* myself think of them. I do not know why you doubt his goodness, you who have never seen him, and he's done you no harm."

"Well, I don't want to hear of his goodness. I don't care a dump for it, though it is but natural you should think it shines like the sun in the heavens," said Mr Ellis. Then after a minute's pause he went on,—"Well, I suppose the happy day will soon be here, when there will be joy-bells, and the villagers will be in their Sunday clothes, and there will be a big feast at the farm, and the bridegroom will have a steady grin on his soap-scrubbed countenance all day, and you will smile back."

"I *hate* sitting, it gives me such a crick in the neck," cried Bessie, bounding out of the branches, and running away.

It was a way of Bessie's. She always took a run

when anything made her miserable. As a child, she would run far out into the fields when any trouble made her little heart sore, and keep running until the misery had got out of it.

To-night I watched her speeding along like a bird on the wing flying into the sunset, her scarlet hood shining on her head until that speck of colour was all I could distinctly see of her.

She had run beyond the orchard into the meadows on which the cows grazed lazily, avoiding George and the labourers.

I took a peep at Mr Ellis from behind the hay-stack: his eyes were following Bessie's light figure. He looked rather disturbed; there was a perplexed expression, half of vexation, half of triumph, on his face.

Then he went on with his painting, but he painted as if his mind were not in it, occasionally glancing towards Bessie; and when one of the boys, having spied her, ran after her, and brought her back with him to George and the other lads, Mr Ellis got up and sauntered towards the group.

When I left he had brought out his book, and they were going indoors to read. I could see that already peace was not far off between him and Bessie.

It was not only at Bill himself that he laughed, but he also turned the lad's honest love into ridicule.

Thus, one evening, I remember, Bessie came alone: she was silent and disturbed. She did not talk of Mr Ellis or anything else, but watered her flowers with a clouded brow. I was under the porch spinning. Presently up comes Mr Ellis, hands in pocket, a cigar in his mouth, sauntering lazily as usual. By the way and look of the man, you'd have thought he was a second Joshua. He need only give a nod to the sun, and the day would keep as long as he liked.

He leant his two arms on the gate and began talking to me. He did not address Bessie, although he watched her, but not with Bill's humble stolen glances. She watered her flowers as if they were the only things she had thought for. When she came to the honeysuckle and sweet-peas, creeping over the arbour Bill had built for her, "What's that?" said Mr Ellis, pushing open the gate and poking with his stick at the sliding roof. "Oh, I see; a shelter for some sick old person."

"It's my gourd!" said Bessie, abruptly, laughing a little.

"Your what?" asked Mr Ellis, puckering up his face.

"It's the arbour, Bill, her betrothed, built for Bessie," I said, speaking slow and distinctly.

"Oh!" says Mr Ellis, "I see; very clever—very clever indeed. It makes me think of rheumatism and asthma though, rather than of Miss Bessie's

brave health and youth. Very good attempt indeed; very creditable, just a little clumsy. Let me see; Bill is the son of that snuffy old widow who lives yonder. He's a bricklayer, isn't he? or a locksmith?"

"Bill's an engineer," I answered, for Bessie did not speak, her head was bent over the flowers. "Apprenticed to the great Mr Stephenson himself. Bill is our genius, and we are proud of him, I can tell you!"

"Genius!" says Mr Ellis; "I must take off my hat—Carbeck's idea of genius! Let me hear what he has done to earn the sacred name. Has he mended all the bolts, winches, and pans of the place? Excellent! Carbeck's idea of genius!" And he laughed, but with a sort of rasp in his laugh.

I caught a gleam of angry tears in Bessie's eyes. "We do not take it upon ourselves to know genius!" I said, spitefully. "It's not for the like of us—we leave that to our betters. It would be a mighty pity for one who thought himself a genius to come to Carbeck for 'preciation. We would not know he was one. It was our clergyman, and then Mr Stephenson, who called Bill a genius."

"Mr Stephenson. Oh yes, that crack-brained fellow—I know—who is going to run carriages six hundred miles an hour, without horses! Wild fancies! Began life as a colliery lad—knows no

better! So Bill's gone crazy too. But he'll get over it. The boy is young—there's hope for him. He will come back some day and settle down to mend your locks and your crockery. A handy lad, simple, honest, perhaps a little bit dull and heavy, as most lads are whose wits lie in their finger ends rather than in their brains. I'm sure I'd like him."

"Maybe he would not like you," said Bessie, giving a jerk to her water-pot, that brought down a storm of drops upon the sweet-peas and honeysuckle."

"Perhaps not," said Mr Ellis, laughing; but I saw he reddened. "I beg pardon; I forgot I was in the presence of first love, that young crocodile—that inveterate, irrational, insatiable, terrible first love. You and I, Mistress Martin, have lived over ours, so we can look back and judge it."

"First love is beautiful!" I began.

"Delusion, Mrs Martin, delusion. An awkward, sickly, hideous period of one's life. Pallid, morbid, timid. A time when a lad sits on the edge of his chair, puts his hat on the coal-scuttle, and gazes open-mouthed at a girl. A period of red ears and clammy hands. Pah! a sickly business! A woman must have the bandage pretty tight on her eyes, not to be revolted at the approach of calf love. I'll make a picture of him for you—not a pretty boy with a drawn bow, like the engraving in Miss Bessie's

possession, but a thin-legged, hungry-looking creature, stuttering of speech——"

"Tut, tut!" I said, laughing. "You'll not frighten first love away by your wit."

"It's pretty true, though!" said Bessie, looking like through a trellis of tears and smiles. "Have you had an attack of first love, you describe it so well?"

"Of course I have! I loved a giant of a woman, when I was sixteen, old enough to be my grandmother. I felt like a titmouse when she looked at me, trembled like a hare when she addressed me, watched her for hours with averted glances, and consumed the night walking up and down my room, in a fever at the thought of her."

"And you got over it?" asked Bessie, her face peering at him curiously from between the wet leaves of the hollyhocks.

"Got over it!" cried Mr Ellis, lifting his handsome head disdainfully. "Am I not a man? I may add, am I not an artist? I should have too much self-respect to make such an ass of myself before the girl I love."

"Most like," said I, "you've no more heart left to love with; it all went out in that calf-love for the big woman."

"Heart! Pish! Nerves, liver, stomach, there is the seat of calf-love," replied Mr Ellis, pitching

away his cigar. Then, as he went on, he reminded me of Bill, for, addressing me, he was slyly watching Bessie all the while. She was standing in the midst of her flowers, and the sunset light caught the drops she was pouring over them and turned them to a silver shower. The air was full of the perfume; that was their way of thanking her.

"A man loves in a self-respecting way," went on Mr Ellis, as if he were laying down the law. "He is not ready to faint each time his sweetheart looks at him. If he is an artist, he loves her through his art. He tells all the world, by his pictures, how beautiful she is. He paints all her little witcheries —the look, the smile he has lain in wait for and caught. This is the way he loves her, not as if he were ashamed of himself, but like a man!"

"Cackles over his love like a hen over her egg," I began. But Mr Ellis did not mind me. He had forgotten me. He was now openly addressing Bessie, whose head was bent. His voice was gentler now; it was as if he were speaking a song.

"Artists are like poets, whose ballads to their sweethearts we sing; so long as their pictures exist, so long we see the face of the girl they loved. That love lives for ever. The world knows the artist only through that woman's face, and the woman but through the artist. That is the only love worth having. And do you think the man

who gives it trembles like a clumsy country lad before her he loves? No; he looks into her eyes, and he compels her to love him."

Mr Ellis walked towards Bessie. There was a kind of authority in his voice; and the quiet of his face, that often made me think it was a mask he wore, was gone. She shrank a little, her breast heaved, and her arm fell as if the water-pot had grown too heavy for her. But she lifted her face to his, almost as if it were drawn upwards against her will, and her eyes flashed softly.

As I looked at the mountain lassie, and the great man come from that far-away city, with all his learning, standing close together, he looking down so steadfastly on her, the thought of that beautiful strange story in the Bible came to me, how the sons of God looked upon the daughters of men, and beheld them to be very fair.

CHAPTER X.

THE thought struck me very soon after that evening that Mr Ellis was really beginning to care for Bessie.

It was one afternoon he came with her. He carried a wooden box under his arm. "Mrs Martin," says he, "you've got a beautiful view here. You'll let me paint it, won't you? I knew you would. Thanks!"

I had grunted out as uncivilly as possible that he might do as he liked.

"I've been working very hard," he went on, "down in the bowels of the earth, and I'm tired. I want some air—some sunshine."

Mr Ellis opened his box and took out a canvas, and put his colours on his palette, and set to work quickly. "This young lady must sit by my side," says he, laughingly, before beginning, handing a chair to Bessie. "She was my model twenty thousand years ago, and a pretty daub I made of it

then" (I knew he was alluding to the moon); "and now I never paint so well as when she is near me to inspire me." And he looked at Bessie with his impudent eyes, though they had a reserve of tenderness beneath them for her.

I fancied Bessie turned a shade paler under his glance. She sat down as he bid, as if she had no choice, but must do what he wished.

I got out my spinning-wheel, and I said to myself I would not stir from his other side.

"That's right!" said Mr Ellis. "Now we're the happiest, cosiest people in the world."

"I see nothing particularly happy or cosy in any of us," I remarked, aggravated, making my wheel buzz, for I was thinking of Bill. "As for Bessie, she would be much better minding her work at the farm, than sitting there with her hands crossed. Others beside me notice how lazy she has grown."

Bessie got up quickly. "I'll go home, aunt, as you tell me. A new way has come over you towards me since you mind the neighbours' talk of me."

She held herself so straight, her frank eyes looked such astonished reproach at me, that I felt humbled before her.

"Sit down, child," I said, crossly enough; "no new way has come over me towards you."

Mr Ellis put his hand on Bessie's skirt. "Your father has intrusted you to me. Where you go, I

follow," he said, looking up at her still with an impudent look that grew into a caress.

She stood as if she hesitated—rebellious, and yet loth to stay; then the spark of anger passed from her eyes as his kept gazing up at her, and she obeyed, sitting on the chair by his side.

"You mean nothing of what you say," Mr Ellis said to me. "We are delightfully happy. What more do we want? Sunshine, blue sky, purple and russet hills, brushes to paint with, a spinning wheel to—to—scold with, and young eyes looking on at us. I for one am content."

I tried to drown his voice with the noise of my spinning-wheel, but it just sounded like the buzz of an angry wasp. Presently Mr Ellis began in a hesitating way new with him. There was a change in his manner—an earnestness I had never felt there: "Do you know, Mistress Martin, last night I did not think I should ever paint again here? This morning I very nearly did what you are wanting me with all your heart to do. I had made up my mind to catch the early coach. I was going to run away. I felt I *must* run away. I must be off. I was working hard to be ready to catch that first coach. I was packing up my paints in a hurry, preparing hastily to be off. Well, do you know what kept me back? It was the sight of a little tattered volume called 'Paul and Virginia' lying

on my table, and in it, to mark every evening where we had left off reading, were faded sprigs of flowers here and there—heliotrope, a bit of thyme, a fern, one was a forget-me-not. They had all been placed there by a little mountain lassie. I could not go. The sight brought back the memory of so much happiness that I was not able to go."

Mr Ellis stopped. He had spoken simply and seriously. It seemed like a veiled way of telling me he cared for Bessie. There was like the feel of truth about him. For the first time I liked him, and there shot through my heart a pang of regret that Bessie was betrothed—a feeling that this man was perhaps better suited to her than Bill was—that his love might have made her happier. I had no sooner felt this than the thought of the absent lad so loving and so trusting came to me, and I was angry with myself.

"Mighty little keeps you from your purpose, if the sight of an old book is enough to make you break your resolution!" I grumbled.

"Mistress Martin!" answered Mr Ellis, resuming his joking ways, but there was a gravity under his jest, "do you know that we live in a world where all is ordered by trifles? Do you know that once a man lost a kingdom for a kiss? and do you know that the history of the world might be different if only a woman's nose had been a quarter of an inch shorter."

"Stuff!" I said, giving my wheel another shove.

Then we were all silent for a while. Through the open window came a big patch of sky, and the broad backs of the mountains shone in the sunlight. The birds twittered. The perfume of the haystacks close to the barn came in with the perfume of the garden flowers. It was a day that comes now and then, all the more beautiful, I think, for the many rainy ones.

Mr Ellis worked on, and Bessie sat near him. I could not see her face, for since he had spoken, her head was bent. I sometimes peeped from the corner of one eye at what Mr Ellis was doing, and saw the hills growing on his canvas in shadow and sunlight, the little rills gleaming, and the red roofs of the farm-houses shining between the trees, the church steeple rising amongst them.

"How lovely!" said Bessie, at last, raising her head and looking at the sketch. Then I saw her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were gleaming.

"Wait till you see my Academy picture! It's nearly finished now. To-morrow, I hope to bring it up to the light again! Then you'll know what I can do!" said Mr Ellis, with assured triumph.

"To-morrow," cried Bessie, "we'll see it. Oh! I am so glad—and then you'll tell us really where it has been."

"I've told you already, Bessie, it has been with the king of the gnomes."

"The king of the gnomes is farmer Smith, I know!"

said Bessie, with a little ripple of laughter through her words. "I know that very well."

"That good, fresh-coloured, hale old man would be flattered if he heard you!" said Mr Ellis. "Yes, the picture is all but done. If all goes well, if no accident happens, if it's not destroyed by fire or cut in its perilous journey up through the earth, you'll see it to-morrow."

"You should not speak of an accident happening to it, even for fun!" said Bessie, reproachfully.

Then we all grew silent once more, and Mr Ellis went on painting.

"This is *too* lovely," he said after a time. "How quiet and peaceful it looks; and that church with the atmosphere of prayer about it, and the tombs gathering close around it. I, dust-covered, weary, worldly sceptic that I am, I envy you your faith."

"What is a sceptic?" asked Bessie, opening her eyes.

"A sceptic, my child!" replied Mr Ellis, pausing in his painting and looking at her. Then as if the words burst from his heart at sight of her innocence, "Do not ask. Keep your faith and be happy, as you are good and beautiful!"

"Does it mean you do not believe all the clergyman says in church, and what is in the Bible!" asked Bessie, the flush deepening on her cheek, and her voice trembling a little.

My spinning-wheel was flying round and round, but neither Mr Ellis nor Bessie, for the matter of that, minded it.

"Bessie, I shall tell you a story," he said. "I know you always like to hear a story, so I shall answer your question through my favourite poet. He is a German, so I cannot use his very own words, but that is all the better. It's a ballad; I have set it to the music of an old Indian melody."

Then he sang a verse of some jargon, through which his voice sounded melancholy and strong.

Some time after I found that same identical ballad put into English poetry, and written out by Mr Ellis in the little blue book he had given Bessie. I remember well all he said about it that day.

"That's what it means, listen!" he went on. "Fancy for yourself a room somewhat like this—only it's night instead of day, and the moon is watching in at the window, silvering the pine-trees outside. Their tiny green fingers tap against the panes. The mountains are higher than these. All nature is silvery, silent, and shining. Can you imagine it?" addressing Bessie, who nodded. "Well, inside the house the good man plays on the cithern, and sings a mountain song. The good woman, like my friend here, is busy spinning. A man in the prime of life, let us hope he is a good-looking fellow, sits by the window in a quaintly-carved oak chair. A girl is

near him. Her eyes are limpid like the stars, her lips are like two damask roses. Does not the picture suggest ourselves?" he asked, bending towards me.

I was too vexed to say anything, for I could not get the thought of Bill out of my heart, so I gave my wheel another shove.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr Ellis. "That is a most eloquent spinning-wheel. It does all Mistress Martin's scolding for her. Do you like it?" he asked gently, turning to Bessie, who again nodded her head quickly. "Well, listen!" He need not have bade her listen. She was hearkening to him as if it were an angel who was speaking to her.

"The maiden asks the man by whose side she sits almost the same question you have asked me. 'Do you believe in the teaching of Holy Church? Have you the true faith? Do you believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?' and the man answers her as I shall answer you, Bessie. When I was a little child, and I looked up to the sky and saw the moon there and the stars keeping their path in the blue heaven, then I believed in God the Father, the Creator of the world, who by His word had made all the wonders I saw around me.

"Then, later, when I grew up to be a young man, I began to love, above all, the dear men and women round me. I was sorry for their sufferings; I under-

stood their faults and how they committed sins. My heart was drawn to them. Then it was that I understood the love of Christ, and I believed in God the Son, who loved us, and who was crucified, because it is the fate of those who teach divine truth to the world, to die.

"Then, when I grew older still and lustier, with will and eagerness to work—when I travelled about, read, and thought—I saw that suffering is caused by ignorance and wicked laws. Then, with all my heart," and Mr Ellis swung his voice, "I believed in God the Holy Ghost, who inspires men. God the Holy Ghost has great armies. Every man who does good to his fellow-men is a soldier of that army. The men who war against falsehoods, who fight against the laws that oppress the people—the artists who teach the world to love beauty, the men of science who make nature obey them,—all these are His valiant soldiers. They have trusty swords. Their white banners gleam. My child," smiling gently on Bessie, whose eyes had a new light in them, burning, yet full of softness, "I cannot say as my ballad maker says to the maiden, 'Kiss me,' but I can say I am one of the soldiers of the Holy Ghost, for I, too, strive by my art to turn the world's gaze from the vulgar and ugly to the Beautiful." As he said this, Mr Ellis's voice was tremulous, like a girl's.

Again I felt touched by the man. I had not understood all he said, but his words seemed to me more beautiful than Mr Orwell's sermons. Then looking at Bessie, who was sitting so still, the thought of Bill again came to me, and I was vexed for feeling touched.

"I don't know what you are," I said, "but I know that Bill is a soldier of the Holy Ghost—as good a soldier as you can find in His army. Isn't he, Bessie?"

"Is Bill a soldier of the Holy Ghost?" asked Mr Ellis.

There we were, both with our eyes fixed on Bessie.

For a moment she was silent. She looked rebellious. An expression, half sad, half impatient, passed over her face, but she looked up bravely at Mr Ellis, and said—

"Yes; Bill is a soldier of the Holy Ghost."

An evil look came into Mr Ellis's eyes, but he said in his cheery voice, "Very well, as you say so, I humbly say so, too."

He did not say much after, and very soon he put up his paints and got up; and Bessie also got up and went out with him.

CHAPTER XI.

THAT night, as I was thinking of going to bed, I was startled with hearing outside the run of feet, the cries of people and of cattle. Looking out, I saw the light of a fire down in the valley. I could see it blazing above the tree-tops. Running out, I met all the villagers hurrying towards the place. Farmer Smith's hay-ricks were on fire, and the barn had caught the flames, and the cow-shed was so close, it would burn soon.

I'll never forget that sight. I often see it when I shut my eyes—the red flames towering higher and higher, rising with a great whirr—making a circle of light more brilliant than noon-day. The trees green, every leaf on them coming out distinct—the apples and pears glowing red—the dead leaves on the ground sparkling between the long shadows thrown athwart them. The red tiles of the roof—every patch of moss and lichen—vivid in the golden glow. Then the bewildered

faces of the men and women, all illuminated. I can see them all.

The terrified animals squeaked and moaned; the horses in the stables kicked and neighed; the sheep in the fold huddled together, trying to break down the wooden barriers; the poultry rushed, cackling, in every direction; and the people were as terrified as the herds. The women clasped their hands, and stood around Mrs Smith, who was bemoaning herself, and in broken accents telling how she had smelt the fire. The men shouted and contradicted each other. They were all more eager to account for how the fire had begun than to settle some plan how to arrest it. Above the confusion, the stars shone sweetly down; and behind the circle of light spread the night, the denser for that ring of fire.

Soon after me arrived Mr Ellis, running from the direction of the farm, where he was still dallying, and behind him came George, and then Bessie, with Sally.

Mr Ellis took the command at once. He did not seem frightened. I half wished he had. I shall doubt my own judgment, and distrust my dislikes, I thought to myself. The terrified country folk obeyed him, as horses the voice of their driver.

"Water! buckets! Bring what you can find! Let the women run home and fetch all the pails, pitchers, buckets, they can lay hold of," cried Mr

Ellis, he himself going into a shed and bringing out buckets lying about.

Before I could tell you, he had formed the men and boys in files, from the well and the Beck, never very far off, to the burning house, and armed them with what vessels there were, to pass along the line. He himself entered the stable and led out the three kicking horses, holding them with a firm hand. He put Tommy Smith on the back of one, and told him to ride with them out of sight of the fire. Almost within the flames, he directed the men. His commanding voice—his handsome, determined face—his fearless bearing, gave courage to them all. Still, I wished he had not come out so brave and noble. Buckets and pails came fast from every quarter. The girls and women formed themselves into relays to help the men in drawing up the water. Soon it was fizzing and pouring on the flames, that rose and towered above with an angrier whirr.

Suddenly a shriek rose. "Where's Jimmy? Oh! Jimmy is not here!" Jimmy was farmer Smith's youngest child, a lad of six. He slept, with his two brothers, in a room above the cow-shed. The two other boys were amongst us, working away, but Jimmy was nowhere to be found. Most like he was still sleeping in his bed, and the flames had reached the shed and were licking the house with

their angry tongues. As Mrs Smith's cry rose, the men and women stopped working, stricken with horror, but Mr Ellis cried out, "At your work, lads! A child missing—— What room?"

The next thing I saw was his carrying a tall ladder and fixing it up against the wall of the house. It reached the boy's window. A second after he was going up. He seemed going up through flames. How they did not burn him was a miracle; it was as if an angel walked by his side, as it did by the three in the fiery furnace. There was a low cry from us, watching him, and some of the women, whose turn had not come to help, knelt down and said, "God bless him!" but the others worked on. Only Bessie stopped, cowering up against me, and gazing towards the window.

Suddenly, from another window, where the flames had not yet reached, Mr Ellis's head appeared, and crying out, "Catch!" he handed out to Jim Torrax, who was just below, a light, broad square. I could not well see what it was, but I heard him say, sharply, "Put it safe—off, there!" Then he disappeared. That moment I remembered the picture. He had saved it first. We knew Mr Ellis would never come down the ladder again, for he had scarce left it before the fire was on it, and we heard it crack and fall. Would he ever come out of the burning house? I cannot tell how long it was—an hour or a minute. After

that we heard his cheery voice shouting, "All right!" from out of the smoke and the flames. A sob, at my elbow, answered his cry. It was Bessie's. At last he appeared, bounding out of one of the ground-floor windows, holding Jim in his arms, who clung with all his might and main to him.

"He's as right as a trivet! He was sleeping like a dormouse," Mr Ellis cried, giving Jim, now roaring and kicking, to Mrs Smith. The poor mother was on her knees trying to kiss Mr Ellis's hand. A group of weeping women surrounded him, but his eyes sought Bessie. Like Bill, on the morning of his leaving Carbeck for London, he did not seem to be aware of those around him. In all the crowd, he only remembered her. And she,—she was standing upright now. She was a transfigured Bessie. She seemed taller, larger. Her head was thrown back—her chest was heaving—her eyes, as they met his, minded me of a summer sunrise, they were so softly bright.

After that, the men worked on with redoubled energy. Mr Ellis's courage had passed into them all. Maybe, too, the house was tougher for the flames to devour, for, after a time, they mastered the fire.

It burned and blazed for more than another hour, but in the morning we found the damage done was not so great as we first thought. The boys' room was a

ruin, the beds burned, the walls charred. If it had not been for Mr Ellis, Jim would have been burned in his sleep. As for the picture, there was not so much as a scratch upon it.

All farmer Smith's corn and hay was consumed, and his sheds were burned down; but Carbeck came to his help, some bringing corn, others hay, others sacks of potatoes. Mr Ellis sent down to Kendal for everything that was necessary for the repairs of the damages, and paid for all.

"It's my cigar did the mischief. I'm such a careless fellow, I may have pitched it amongst your hay-ricks, as we were talking over the stile, and I watched the sunset. It's only fair I should pay my bill, and it's very good of you all not to turn me out of your village," Mr Ellis said, pleasantly, laying his hand on farmer Smith's shoulder, when he thanked him for his kindness.

As we never could account for the fire otherwise, it is very like that Mr Ellis's cigar was the cause of it. There had been a spell of dry weather, and the hay caught fire readily.

But the good people did not think of the cause. They only remembered Mr Ellis's bravery, and the way he had gone into the flames to save a child's life, risking his own for it. That he was a real gentleman, valiant and kind, such as they had never seen, or were like to see again, they all agreed.

Even Mr Horton blew his praises, and did not find fault with the others' fair words of him.

It never struck them Mr Ellis had gone into the fire to save his picture. They thought pictures were pictures, but they did not attach much value to them. When a man could begin one soon as the other was finished, it did not signify much one getting burned. It was Jimmy Mr Ellis had gone to save. George, being his host, was surrounded by a reflection of Mr Ellis's glory, and everybody listened and looked up to him more than ever; and George said, slowly puffing away at his pipe—

"The Duke of Wellington, who beat Buonaparte, the whole world could not beat before, could not have behaved braver than Mr Ellis did in the fire!"

Everybody felt George had said the right thing, and that Mr Ellis was only second to the Duke of Wellington.

"We'll none of us ever forget how you saved little Jimmy's life," said Bessie, tremulously, the day after the fire, to Mr Ellis.

"I don't care a dump how many will forget it, if you'll remember it sometimes, Bessie, when I am gone," Mr Ellis replied, with feeling. "If I had not felt your brown eyes following me up that ladder, I am not so sure Jimmy would not have run a good chance of being roasted."

"Oh!" said Bessie, perplexed between delight and blame.

Then she came in, all sparkling, to me. I thought for a moment she had had a letter from Bill. But no, it was to speak of the fire. Was it not grand? Was not Mr Ellis a hero, like some one in a story? And was it not good also—the beautiful picture was saved, just as it was finished?"

"Good!" I said; "that's all he minded. Little he thought of your brown eyes going up that ladder. It was of the picture up-stairs he thought. If it was not for the picture, Jimmy would have roasted!"

"You're not fair to him!" said Bessie, standing very upright, the colour rising in her face. "You speak but harsh things of him. It was only of how to save Jimmy he thought."

CHAPTER XII.

"THERE, now, I've said enough for to-night," said Dame Martin, interrupting herself suddenly. "Goodness gracious! the clock is on the stroke of twelve, and I had not noticed it. I was back again in the old days." Here the old lady's voice faltered.

"Nay; do not stop, Mrs Martin!" I cried, eagerly. "Sit still just a little while longer. I must hear to the end. I am interested in all the people you have been telling me of. They are all living to me. Tell me something of Bill, now."

"Well, here is something that will tell you better of Bill than I can. Here is a bit of a journal he kept for Bessie while he was in London. To my mind, it's like seeing into the lad's heart. Poor laddie! at the last moment he was ashamed to show it to her. There, you may have it, and read it to-morrow, before I begin again and tell you to the end."

Mrs Martin, saying these words, had gone to the oaken press from which she had taken the

sheets of outline drawings, the legal document, and the faded blue book, some evenings ago. She now took out a roll of paper, tied round with a dim, cherry-scarlet ribbon.

"There," she said, handing it to me. "Do not lose the ribbon," she added, quickly; "it was Bessie's."

I took the MS. to my room, but I could not read it that night. I had made no provision of extra candle, and mine was worn down low. I had just time to unfold and open the pages, so neatly sewn together, and to look at the round, legible handwriting, careful in every curve and dot, recognising the same that had so minutely described the patent. Perhaps it set me meditating over the story I had heard longer than I was aware of, for, as I still sat with the pages before me, there came a sudden sinking of the light, a sputter, and I was left in darkness.

The next morning, however, I took the written sheets out into the mountains. There, in the sweet, warm weather, in a glen, shut in on every side, I read the following record Bill kept in London:—

Bill's Journal.

"*Wednesday, 28th June.*—I had a thought last night,—I shall keep a journal for Bessie. Postage is too dear to send many letters, and it's weary waiting without putting pen to paper to her oftener than

once a-month. A journal! What is it? How should it be written? If I think twice of what it should be, I shall never write it; or else it will be stiff and heartless, and dry as my office books. I'll write it for Bessie. There are such lots of things that I think of, and I should like Bessie to see into my heart. It will be like telling her everything that happens. When I bring it home next Christmas it will be too cold to sit out in the arbour, but we'll read it in Mrs Martin's kitchen. There will be the fire, and the blue delf about, and Mrs Martin will be sitting spinning by the hearth. Bessie and I shall sit quite close together—perhaps she'll let me hold one of her hands. She may; for she may not be so shy then, thinking of my love, and of all the time I have been away, and with the other hand she'll turn over the pages. I'll have to read out bits, and all the hard words, for she's not much of a hand at reading writing yet. I'll write this as round and plain as I can. Every now and then she'll turn her rosy, smiling face, and open wide her shining eyes with wonder, as she asks me questions. Often she'll guess the answers before I bring them half out. How will you look, Bessie, when you read this, by my side?

"*Thursday, 29th June.*—Already those pages are dear to me, although I have scribbled but these few lines on them. It is pleasant to me to look at their

shining white faces, and think of all that will be written on them for Bessie to read. They help to make me feel sure I am not living in a dream, for it's difficult to make sure one is awake, when everything is so different—new faces everywhere—no one caring for me; and then, when I awake in the morning, to see only a strip of sky through the dingy houses, instead of the cool, blue mornings over the orchards, and the mountains all around. In Edinburgh, the hedgerows were not so far off. I would not take much into account the present seeming like a dream, if I could but feel sure the past is real—that we are betrothed—that just fourteen days ago I kissed Bessie; for I felt success and peace would have no flavour if I went away without that one kiss.

"*Friday.*—I take my pen up again to write for Bessie, and now I'll describe my room. It's a small room, with a shelving roof, for it is at the top of a house that is all let out in lodgings. Everybody in it is asleep now; London itself seems asleep. It is so quiet—although the quietest quiet of the big city is more restless than the voice of Carbeck when it is at its loudest. The hubbub of the million souls in it can never quite be hushed. I must explain all this to you. There is always the stir of their breathing, of their very thoughts, some of which you'd never guess at, my stainless sweetheart. In one corner of the room is my bed; close to it (for nothing in it can be very far

off), is my table, on which are my papers, pencils, compasses, and the little lamp Mrs Martin gave me. Close under it, where it may catch all the light, is the knitting-needle I stole from you, slipping it quick from the grey stockings you were knitting, when your back was turned. I laugh still, thinking how you looked up and down, and in every corner of the bower, and when you could not find it, you said it had been witched away. I did not say nay, but kept it close, tight under my waistcoat, and was in mortal fright a bit of it, shining, would peep out, and tell whereto it had been witched away. And here I've put it, where it may catch all the light, and in the mornings I lock it up safe; for to my landlady it might seem but a common needle, and she might take it away and use it for knitting her own stockings. And near it are the socks you knitted for me, just as you folded them yourself, with the sprigs of blue lavender you picked for me that morning. I fancy I see the print of your fingers on each stalk. They're like love-letters to me. All about are the things mother and the neighbours gave me. They ought to make me fancy I have carried away a bit of home with me. Yet, sometimes, I feel as if I would never see again our mountains and our tarns. I'll not give in to home-sickness. I'll work hard. I'll work for Bessie. I ought to have no sinkings of the heart, with such a blessed thought here. Is

it not strange, when I think of it, I need never be at a loss to know which way to turn to look towards Bessie's home. In the strip of sky just above me the blessed polar star watches, and my compass points north. It is like as if in heaven and earth there were finger-marks pointing to where my sweetheart lives, to Cumberland in the north!

"*Wednesday, 5th July.*—I've not been able to write my journal for four days, I've been so busy. All the world is wagging its head, and calling Mr Stephenson names. It might just as well put a finger under a steam-hammer to stop it. Poor little finger will get bruised, and the steam-hammer won't know it. We'll make the railway yet. We'll not be stopped by all the interests roused up against us. If it were not for the difficulties it throws in Mr Stephenson's way, I'd laugh at the cackling of the geese. Mr Stephenson was in the office this morning, and he said, 'Good sound abuse is like the steam blast. It makes the furnace glow. Tut, lads! let them prate. When the ear is used to the anvil, it's deaf as pig-iron to their clamour. We'll do it! —we'll do it!'

"When the great locomotive steams over the rail, they'll give way. Sometimes I forget I am in London—I forget the glare of the sunshine, the stuffy streets, I am so busy copying out plans of engines, brakes, and rails. But I'll not write down the hard

words for you, Bessie. Sometimes, when I am in my little room at night, I walk up and down dreaming of the work that is going to be done. I forget all but this and you, Bessie. God forgive me for it if it is sinful, but the thought of you comes before my duty, my work, my mother.

"*Sunday.*—Again all these days without finding so much as a minute to write in my journal. I've time to-day, so I can write a long story of what happened yesterday. You are my festival, my Sabbath, Bessie. I had to go on business to the Bank, and when my business was done, I thought I would push on and have a peep at the parts I had not seen before. I'm getting used now to the noise, the flurry, and the crowd of strange indifferent faces, so I pushed on until I came to a place they call St Giles's. A sink of iniquity! They should not call it after the name of one of God's saints. You could not imagine, Bessie, or think, the like of such a place. It was Saturday, and the men had got their week's wages. Half of them were drunk, and many of the women too. Some were lying asleep on the ground, some were standing in the dark doorways of their houses or the public-house. They had such brutal, begrimed faces; I thought I should stifle, for there was scarcely a bit of sky let in above to sweeten the place. But the sight of the children and the young girls was the worst part of all. The bairns

had such pale faces, so old looking, legs no thicker than broomsticks, but then their eyes looked innocent. Some comely lasses, standing in groups, stared at me and tittered, and looked—well, not as they look in the country. I thought of the orchard-trees and the fresh tufted grass where you were standing, Bessie, and it never seemed so pretty as now. A woman, who would have been a bonnie-looking creature, but for the anger on her face and the city dirt, was scolding in a loud voice a man, sitting like a log, with a stump of a pipe in his mouth. He was no more able to say a word, or to move, no more than a dirty barrel of beer. It was fearful to hear the woman's words, and to see her eyes all alight with fury. She would go from him—she was tired of working for one who could not so much 'as keep the kids at home.' I cannot get rid of the poor creature's expression. A few paces off two men began to scuffle coming out of the public house. A little girl, no bigger than Effie Greene, leapt up from the curb-stone where she was playing, her hair flying, her eyes dancing in her head. 'A fight—a fight!' she cried, as gleeful as the bairns at home cry out at the sight of the red cherries in the trees. From every side came children, their bare bodies showing through their rags, running and tumbling towards the place, where the men fought and swore, with a crowd round them, laughing and joking. At last I found a turn,

and then I came into another street, as God-forsaken looking, but there were less people in it.

"Now for my story, Bessie, for most like I'll never let you see what I have written up there. Soon as I turned, I heard the shrill, sweet whistle of a bird, filling all the street. I was back into the leafy green woods that moment. When I looked round I saw a shop, a kind of bird-fancier's shop—such a queer place, Bessie! Outside were perches and cages in which were parrots and canaries, rare and bright. There were squirrels also, turning round and round in their cages, making believe to themselves they were scampering about in the trees. There were rabbits and white mice, and in a cage by himself was a bullfinch with a red breast and a beautiful black glossy head.

"The pretty fellow kept repeating the high long note I had heard. I have five shillings I have been scraping up to buy something for you, and I thought maybe he'll not be more than five shillings, and I'll bring him to Bessie. I stepped inside the shop. It was quite dark and low. After a minute, I could just see a ferret with a sharp nose peering at me, and I heard scrambling and twittering all round. A woman came out of the back shop. I could not help a little shudder at sight of her. I thought I was standing before a witch. She had sleepy black eyes, and eyelids so red and wrinkly, and her nose such a hook! she

had just a couple of wisps of iron-grey hair, and, coiled round her neck, was—what do you think?—a snake. Its head was lying under her chin. A creepy sensation went up my back at sight of it, and all the while she kept stroking it as if it were her pet. 'What do you want?' asked the uncanny woman, quite civilly. I told her with a quaver in my voice, and ducking away from the snake's head, I wanted to know the price of the bullfinch outside.

"'It's three pound ten shillings,' she said, 'and it's letting it go for nothing.'

"My face must have fallen as I thought what a long way my five shillings was from three pound ten. The woman now began to speak loud, abusing folk who were no better than beggars coming in. What did I expect to get it for?

"As she spoke there shambled out a lad from the same back shop whence she had come. I saw at once the poor creature was witless. His eyes were red, he was weak-kneed. He kept laughing at me, and throwing his arms about. Some white mice were running up his back and having a game in his hair. It was just like being amongst the wicked elves you tell stories of, Bessie. Outside, Bully was singing. I asked the weird woman if she would keep him back for me, and I would come and buy him later. She hissed out, 'I only understand one sort of business, young man, and that's the coin in the hand.'

And so I went: Bully's whistle, following me to the end of the street, seemed to be saying, 'Buy me for Bessie—buy me for Bessie.' When I reached home, and put my hand into my pocket for my five shillings to hoard them up, they were gone—they and my handkerchief and pocket-book; my pocket had been picked clean. But I'll try hard to scrape up the money wherewith to buy Bully. I'll find out something I can do without—it's not plain at first sight what; but at nights I can do a little more extra copying of plans, for which I get paid.

"*Tuesday.*—A letter from home, written by Mr Horton for mother, who cannot hold a pen herself. Poor mother! she's all in a flurry, lest no one looks after my victuals, and there's no one to see after my washing properly, and she bids me say my prayers, for London is full of sin like Egypt was. Then she gives me village gossip, so that I can almost fancy I am back in the dear old home. But what set my heart all beating was the sight of a postscript from Bessie, not in Mr Horton's writing, that has no more feeling in it than a row of black nails stuck in a board, but in Bessie's own, big, round letters, rambling all ways up and down the page. Dear heart! how she must have toiled, and covered with ink her pretty finger tips, so that they looked like flowers peeping through grime, to send me those precious lines. She would have laughed if she had seen how

I kissed the round letters, even the blot she let fall in the middle. How can I ever be grateful enough to her for that letter? I can read it every day. It's better than the song of the lark, Bessie's innocent prattle! Daisy, the cow, has a calf, and mother's quite well, and everybody at home, and she hopes this finds me the same. We often talk together of you, she writes. Bless her for that! Bless her for her faithfulness! She never forgets to water the creepers round the arbour, and the honeysuckle has put out a new shoot, long as her hand and half way up to her elbow. Precious little hand and arm! it's not a mighty job for a honeysuckle to get as long as they. Then she asks me of London. Is it very big? Is it as big as Carbeck and Kendal put together? God bless her! I am glad no one is by to see my eyes full of tears, looking at the letter come all the way from home, with my sweetheart's thought of me, and a blossom of clover she put in fresh plucked from the meadow. It will part make up for being away, to come back and tell Bessie about London. I'll have stories to tell her now—stories that will keep her all day listening—that will make her open her eyes wide and wider with wonder. There will be Bully also! She'll like to hear about him, and how and where I found him, as he pipes in his cage at her window.

"I humbly thank God for that letter! My lungs

seem full of the air of my own mountains—I could sing out loud. In all London there's not another man so proud or so happy as I, with Bessie's postscript against my heart. I could almost think, she is so canny and kind, that she folded up inside the paper a ray of the sun shining over my village, and sent it to me. I can work now—I have a plan in my head—I feel I can work it out.

"*Wednesday, 2d August.*—It's more than three weeks since I have written anything inside my journal, but I have written hóme, and the letters to mother and Bessie took me a rare long while to write. I did not hurry over the last. Then I have been working hard over nights. I'm trying that plan. Some time ago, I overheard Mr Stephenson say to another engineer, he wished he had time to devise a plan by which to make more direct the connection of the steam cylinders with the propelling wheels. Then the locomotive would be perfect. The thought came to me, why should I not do it? I had already designed a brake that had won his praise, and was the cause of my being now in London apprenticed to him. So every night, after doing the extra copying that pays for my keep, and out of which I put a little aside to buy Bully, I have worked at that plan—I have worked until the sky whitened behind the high houses, and I knew at home the dawn was breaking over the mountains.

Then I've read Bessie's little letter, and I've taken a sleep. This has been my life. But twice I have gone beyond my lodgings and the office, and then it was to take a tramp over to a heath some way out of London, to clear my head, that had an uncommon feel of being covered with cobwebs.

"*Friday.*—I have worked out two or three plans, but there is not one perfect yet. It is not what I want. The idea seems like just standing outside my brain, but it won't let me grasp it entirely. Sometimes I get down-hearted, feeling moidered, what with work and the occasional home-sickness that bursts over me. But I shall not give in.

"*Sunday, 20th August.*—I have found it—the work is done. There the perfect plan lies on my table —and, Bessie, it was you whispered the last touch it wanted. Last night, I had worked till I could work no more—I was almost in despair—one of those fits of home-sickness had come over me, and I felt as if my heart was so lonely, it was just fit to break. Outside, the rain was falling and pattering against the panes and roofs—it had rained all day. I think I must have fallen asleep, for, Bessie, you came into my room, and I no longer heard the rain outside. The room grew cheerful, and my heart so full of joy. Strange I did not wonder how you came all that way alone through the rain! You took off your wet shawl, and laughed as you tossed your brown hair

all dripping. I heard you laugh quite distinctly, your pretty laugh. And then you came and leant over me, and looked over my papers. I felt your hand on my shoulder, your soft cheek against mine, and I trembled. Then you said, what you never said before—you said you loved me, yet I did not think it was a dream; and instead of shrinking from me, of your own accord you kissed me, not once or twice, but many times. I thought I heard joy-bells in my ears. Suddenly you put back my hair and whispered something—I could not catch what—but next minute you were gone.

"Once more I heard the rain falling outside, and saw how gloomy the room was. I did not dare to stir lest the happiness should fall away. I remained quite still until my eye caught sight of the plan lying on my table. Then it burst upon me suddenly what it was would make it perfect, and I knew you had come and brought me the word of it.

"*Thursday.*—Showed the plan to Mr Stephenson to-day. He was delighted with it. He followed out all the lines with his forefinger, nodding all the time. 'Yea, lad, yea,—that'll do,—that'll do—you've done it!' he kept saying, chuckling to himself. You should have seen, Bessie, his kind, shrewd face, getting brighter and brighter with approbation. At last he took the bit of paper and waved it over his head. "Hurrah!" he cried, with

that burr in his speech which has the sound of home in my ears. "We'll do it yet!—we'll do it! We'll beat the canal company, the coaches, and Parliament too, if it stands in our way. I but want lads like you for my bodyguard, and we'll win the day. Eh, boy, you'll carry your sweetheart over the lines yet!"

"That's what he said, Bessie—his very words. He's a man that to my thoughts makes plain the words of Scripture, of faith removing mountains. All the world is against him, might and main. He's called a maniac for saying he'll run a train over Chat Moss, that's but a heavy bog, where not a man can go over now without sinking. But he'll do it—he'll do it. He cannot say much more than that he'll do it, for he's no more better able than Moses was to make his ideas plain, being slow of speech. But it's not words that will do it, no more than words that will prevent it.

Since Mr Stephenson said that about my carrying my sweetheart over the lines, I've been thinking of the day when I'll take you, Bessie, to see the locomotive that is to snort fire like leviathan, and will shine like a scaly fish. As you feel yourself drawn along, flying past the fields and hedgerows, across the rivers, under the mountains, will you be frightened, eh, Bessie? Will you draw close up against me, like a scared bird?

"*Monday.*—They think a deal of the plan at the office. To-day there came some gentlemen to the office to see it. Mr Stephenson explained it to them. Mr Locke came and complimented me upon it. He said I should be a rich man some day; what was better, I should be one of those who helped most in the great fight for steam power over canal sloth. Mr Stephenson is going to take out a patent in my name, and he has offered to buy it from me. I have accepted the offer. Soon as I have the money I'll go and buy Bully. I'd rarely like to have the little chap hanging at my window until the day comes round for me to bring him home to Bessie.

"*Friday, 8th September.*—I must have been tired after all the excitement. I've been run near off my legs, going to the Patent Office and back. I've had to make elaborate diagrams of the plan, and write descriptions of it. Now this part of the task is finished. It was more wearisome than thinking it out. Mr Stephenson says he'll bring me the money next Monday. One of the fits of home-sickness came over me, when I feel as if I could never bear up if I don't get a sight of you, Bessie—of the mountains—of the farm-houses amongst the orchards; that I shall stifle if I don't get a gulp of fresh air. So after office hours I tramped off—away miles—to a place called Hampstead, where there's a heath

stretching away far as you can see, and pine-trees standing in a knoll against the sky. I know every step of the way. I oftener than not spend my Sundays there. I can take the fill of my lungs of air, fresh, although it's not my mountain air. I had Carlo with me—a big black retriever. He used to belong to one of the lodgers. The poor beast took a fancy to me, for I kept a bit of dinner for him, as his master neglected him. The other day Carlo changed masters, on the promise of twelve shillings, which is to be paid soon as Mr Stephenson gives me the money. It looks uncommonly like as if Carlo had understood all about the bargain. He now sleeps outside my door, and wakes me in the morning by a scratching at it. He comes to fetch me from the office. He's punctual as a sun-dial. He's never a minute late. To-day Carlo and I tramped off together; but we made a long round to get a sight of Bully. It cheered away some of the miserable longing for home to see the little fellow hopping about with his glossy black head and scarlet chest. He began to pipe when I came, like cannily showing off what he could do. Then Carlo and I went over the way to look for a cage for him. There is one that is green and white, with a round roof, on which some little bells are fastened; and a bath, green and white, is at the bottom of the cage. That is to be Bully's future

home. Will you croon a little song to him, Bessie, which he'll answer with his shrill whistle? Perhaps Bully will feel like me in hearing your voice, and at the sight of you, so good and pure, as if the time of loneliness in London was a bad dream from which God has wakened us both. It is because I am overworked I have those sinkings of the heart. Carlo and I stayed out near all night. They say it's dangerous coming so late across the outlying roads around London; but with my stick and Carlo I have no fear, and I know better now than carry my few shillings in my pocket. I must have fallen into a trance, for I seemed to see the meadows and orchards, every blade of grass, every leaf, like fast asleep, and to hear the Beck singing softly to itself. The stars were awake and watching. I saw mother's cottage, the little pathway through the laurel bushes, and the mountain-ash springing up amongst them, leading to Mistress Martin's door, and the farm-house where Bessie was lying fast asleep. The sight did me good. I am off to work again to-day, and I feel all my pride in it.

"*Monday.*—Have received a letter from Mrs Martin. She says a stranger has come to Carbeck. He is a painter. He thinks Bessie so pretty that he's painting her. I am proud and delighted! I wonder who is to have the picture. How sunshiny it would

make my empty walls. What is it, in that letter, which gives me a sort of chill, as if there were illness at home, or that she would have me pack up and go back? Only fancy, I've read it again.

"*Tuesday.*—Bully is gone—clean gone. I went for him to-day. The cage was there, but there was a green canary in it. The other day I already thought he was mine. To-day Mr Stephenson paid me more money than ever I thought a thing coming out of my brain would be worth. At my asking he kept back some to pay for my apprenticeship, against his will, but I do not like to be beholden even to him for what I can pay. I took with me four shining pieces of gold, and wrapped them safe up in paper, holding them in my hand, and I went for the little fellow. At first I could not believe he was gone. I thought he must be inside the shop, and so I went in. The weird woman and her idiot son came out, as before, from the back shop. She had not the serpent round her neck, but there was a white mouse creeping up her dress. I asked for the bullfinch. She told me, in her rough voice, she had sold him the night before, and right glad she was. It was not one who could not pay for it who would have the bird. I showed her my four bits of gold: at the sight of their shining the idiot boy shrieked with delight. She put out her greedy hands for them, and said she would get

another bird for me for to-morrow. But it's not another—it's that one I want, whose voice sounded fresh and pure that day I realised the squalor and sin of this big city, and whose thought has been so woven with that of Bessie these many weeks. It's but foolish, how this trifle has affected me. It's like some tie snapped between me and my love. That's an ill thought cast against her, who is so leal. There is only death can take one from the other now. I'll get rid of it. I would not return with my money, so I looked about for something for Bessie, and I saw a ring in a jeweller's window. There was a stone, like alive with rays of light shooting across it. They call it an opal. I bought it for our betrothal ring. It cost just four pounds, and I carried it off, and it's lying near my heart, where it will lie until I place it on Bessie's finger. Mrs Martin told me how, when we were children, I carried the cross with the lilies that was too heavy for Bessie's little arms to carry. All I want now is to carry the cross for her through life; and so, God help me, I will."

The journal stopped here. I thought the simple record might have been headed, "A young man's heart." Such single love will surely win you, Bessie, I mused, addressing the dainty faded ribbon Mrs Martin had bid me care for.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM the day of the fire, I noticed that Bessie grew melancholy, resumed Dame Martin, the following evening. She went quietly about the house, doing the work, but I never heard her laugh or sing as she used. I often watched her, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, with a look in her eyes as if she had lost her way. Once I caught her crying in the orchard, and she would not tell me why she cried. She said, crossly, when I pressed her, jerking away the tears with the corner of her apron, there was nothing the matter with her—she liked to have a cry now and then.

It is natural that we old people should be sad, but it's against nature that the young ones should be so. My heart brimmed over with pity for my lassie. I asked myself if, after all, I was not hardened and prejudiced. Perhaps, I reasoned out to myself, this engagement is like a cage to a poor little yearning bird. A promise lightly given, which,

indeed, she meant to keep at the time, but given under influences which would have made a greybeard give it at Carbeck, and it was but a servitude when the bairn awoke and found it was all wrong. Why should my love for Bill be the measure of hers? I thought I would question Bessie, and prove her to the heart.

That evening, as it happened, she came, holding a letter from Bill in her hand. I could not but feel glad, just as in the old way, at the sight of the boy's round writing, that was so plain to read. Then, like the cut of a knife through my heart, came the thought of the grief that might be waiting him.

"Is that a letter from Bill?" I asked.

"Yes," answered Bessie, holding it out to me. She had never before given me one of his letters. She would hold it herself, and read out bits aloud to me, and have a chat between. As I read, Bessie sat in her corner knitting, and I saw her hands tremble a little. It was like hearing Bill talk to read his letter—just like his journal you read—and to-night he was more than usually happy, for Mr Stephenson was giving him extra work. I am sure, if you could have taken a peep inside Bill's heart, as in that queer tale you told me the other day, you would have thought you were inside a workshop. You would have seen plans of inventions lying in every corner, and drawings everywhere;

and through it you would always be hearing the boom of machinery, and the whistling of the engines —all of it lit, as by the noonday sun, by his love for Bessie, and faith in her. The modest way in which he told that love was a long way finer, I thought, than all Mr Ellis's grand speeches. Still, there was my lassie, growing pale and thin, and forgetting how to sing.

"He's a good lad is Bill," I said, folding the letter, speaking hesitatingly, and watching Bessie. "'Tis like enough we old folk should be proud of him. There never was the like of him for brains at Carbeck. Ever since he was a small lad you could go to him with your things all broken, and he'd make them as good as new again for you; and then, when he grows up he invents something that makes the great Mr Stephenson take such notice of him. We old folk, natural enough, think no end of him."

"Oh yes," answered Bessie, listlessly, "he's very clever with his fingers."

"Nay, lassie," I said, "a man's head is not like the painted head on a ship's prow—a senseless thing, that turns, with the boat, which way the wind blows. It's a man's head that directs his fingers. 'Tis because Bill's head is so full of thoughts that his fingers are so deft. Still, lassie, it's not because the old see one way the young see that way too. You need not put other folk's spec-

tacles on your heart's eyes to look at the man you love. 'Tis not of our way of seeing Bill that you must think."

"What must I think of?" asked Bessie, looking up, as if some sleeping hope had woke up in her eyes.

"You must think if you love him, lassie—if he is the first in your thoughts. He's a good lad, as deserves a loving wife, and not one who will think there are other men better than he."

"I wish he were not so good and so trusting," said Bessie, sadly, moving out of the light.

"Nay, lassie, that's an ill wish. 'Tis Bill's heart that makes him the lad he is, more than his head, let alone his fingers. But 'tis not of that ye must think, although he's loved you with it since ye were a little bairn, and you've promised him to be his wife."

Bessie did not answer. After a bit she walked to the window. Through the dusk, I could see her leaning far out of it. The light fell on her head and shoulders, but I could not see her face.

"He's loved you since you were a tiny child, and he'll love you till he dies; but if you do not love him, Bessie, you ought to be true and tell him so, and not let him believe as you will be his wife."

As she remained silent, I went on: "'Tis true, no Carbeck girl has played false to her lover yet,

and none had one so faithful and canny as Bill. But it's like trying to make wheat-bread out of chaff to try to be happy with doing like other folk, when the heart feels different."

Still Bessie did not speak, but remained leaning out of the window.

"Poor lad!" I continued. "Maybe it will break his heart, but it is better only one heart should be broken than marry him without love, and then break both yours and his."

"Why do you speak to me like that, aunt!" cried Bessie, at last, turning round suddenly and looking at me. Her breast was heaving, her mouth was trembling, her eyes looked round and large with unshed tears. "I'll not break Bill's heart. I'll not let the Carbeck girls point at me, and say I'm the only one as has been false to her lover. I'll marry Bill. I've promised it, and I'll bide by it."

"Eh, lassie!" I said, "if ye only could love him! It's not only his heart, but his life, you'd break if you played him false. He's got genius ——"

"Nay, he's got no genius," said Bessie, walking up and down, with her hands clasped above her head.

"Mr Orwell——" I began.

"Mr Orwell, he knows nothing of it," she answered, with a little sob, choking her voice. "If he did, as he is a gentleman and able to do as he likes, he

would not go away from it. He could not be happy away from it, if he had lived near it once. It would be so dull and miserable for him without it."

"Why, Bessie, what is genius?" I asked, looking at her astonished as she kept restlessly walking up and down. It was just like the flutter of the little bird pining in its cage, my thoughts had likened her to.

"Oh aunt! oh aunt! it is so beautiful!" moaned Bessie. "It comes over you so softly. You do not know at first what makes your life so different. It is as if you were always at your prayers. All the feelings you have at the sight of something lovely are made plain to you. It is as if you were better than yourself. Then suddenly it comes to you one day like a light that blinds you—it goes through you like a burning ache, and yet ye can care for nothing else."

"Child, child! That's not genius, that's love! and you're going to marry Bill!" I cried.

It was a cry that escaped me. Bessie paused in her walk, stood before me, trembling all over. Her eyes were dilated, her breath was coming shorter than usual.

"Why must I marry Bill?" she said. "Why must I? Suppose after all I am sinful and don't love him. Suppose I *can't* love him. It's easy to say I need not marry him; why then bring up the Car-

beck girls and say I'll break his heart? Must I marry him only because he loves me—only because the Carbeck girls will talk?"

Before I could say aught she was gone. She had run out of the house. I thought of a story I had read in the Lirple paper of a girl who had thrown herself into the Mersey, because her friends were forcing her to marry one man when she loved another; and thinking of Bessie's face, a horrid fear made me run down the little path into the valley towards the river, after her.

I saw her figure running like a grey shadow into the grey night before me.

"Bessie! Bessie!" I cried, but she did not answer nor stop. She kept running on, on, towards the Beck, whose brawling over the stones I could hear in the greyness. As I reached the valley another figure came out of the darkness as if it had risen out of the ground, and cried "Bessie" after her. But still she never turned—she ran still desperately on.

"Bessie!" we both cried, following in her track. And all the echoes in the mountains caught up her name—it was as if all the mountain spirits were calling after her.

I saw her come to the Beck. I stopped running. Then I saw her leaping from stone to stone and reach the other side. Then she ran on towards the farm, and disappeared.

Mr Ellis turned sharp round upon me. I could just see his face in the darkness; it was white with excitement.

"What have you been saying and doing to her?" he asked, and his voice had lost its usual pleasant ring. "You've been at her again to marry that clown—that lout whom you people call a genius, because he can mend the locks of your doors! I tell you it can't be. She can't marry him. There's no tie, there's no bond between them," and he spoke every word heavily. "She—she might be a queen, a Madonna! Her softness and fire might nerve a man to reach his highest! Her beauty would set the world raving for the pictures he'd paint of her! Marry that clown! I tell you she *can't*. She's porcelain, he's clay." And Mr Ellis swung his hand as if it were a hammer, with which he broke the tie that bound them.

"She will marry him!" I cried as soon as I could get in a word between his loud asserting phrases. "Bessie will bide by her promise to Bill—I know she will, for all your falsehoods of him and your flatteries of her."

We were on the bank of the river. Bessie had crossed as she ran. Mr Ellis, tall and lithe, was standing on a boulder. As the water foamed about him he seemed to me, in the dimness, like an evil spirit, strong to hurt, that had risen from the depths of the river.

"Bide by her promise to Bill!" he repeated scornfully. "I tell you," raising his clenched hand, and again letting it fall heavily, "*she can't.*"

Then he turned, and I heard the scrape of his feet leaping over the stones, and disturbing some that fell into the water. "She will," I cried, but my voice sounded like a weak child's. It seemed like to fall at my feet. If Mr Ellis heard, he did not answer. Only the gurgling water seemed to chuckle as it passed me, and the foam looked like the white faces of mocking water-witches.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL that night and next day my heart yearned for my lassie. But she did not come to me; and so, towards evening, I set off to go to her. "Poor bairn!" I said to myself; "she must not think evil of herself. Love is a mystery, like the blowing wind. We 'know not whence it cometh,' and it's not us as can tell our hearts to withstand it. I must think of this, and not put in any arguments for Bill in my talk with her."

A long way off, I saw George leaning over a stile in one of his fields, smoking his pipe, and looking at his pasture-lands, where his cows and sheep were grazing. He looked as content as a fat pigeon in the sunshine. Everything about George seemed to say, he was the most important man in those parts, the richest yeoman; as if it were a matter-of-fact like the mountains in Carbeck—a something that could not be disputed.

"Well, sister, and how are you to-night?" he

asked in his comfortable voice, taking his pipe from one corner of his mouth, and putting it into the other.

"I've come to see Bessie," I answered; "the lassie has not been near me all day, and I've a foolish way of thinking some harm's come to her, when I do not get a sight of her."

"Nay, nay; no harm's come to her," says George, giving a puff to his pipe, and leaning more cosily forward on his arms.

"Where is she?" I asked.

George laughed gurglingly. "She's been in the sulks all day."

"I'm glad to hear it," I cried, forgetting my resolutions. "I hope she's not been near Mr Ellis all day."

"Nay, she has not," answered George, smoking. Somehow, he struck me as looking more complacent than usual.

"What has he been doing—your friend?" I asked. "Has he been painting you?"

"He has," says George, looking straight ahead of him. "He has put me into a picture."

"You!" I cried. "Well, he must have been in bad want of something to paint."

And then it struck me as so comical, George being put into a picture, and he pulling his face to look as if he did not care about it, that I laughed

till the tears ran down my cheeks. "Why—why—did he—not—paint the—the mountains?" I asked, when I could speak.

George's grey eyes were dancing with anger. He took his pipe out of his mouth. "'Tis what Mr Ellis was saying this morning. 'How is it,' says he, 'how is it that ye're the brother of Mistress Martin, who is a tolerable good woman, but, says he, who has no idea of art or of genius? I can't understand it, Mr. Lang,' says he; 'I can't understand it, when I see how you 'preciate them.'"

"He makes such a fool of you all, your Mr Ellis," I said, still shaking with laughter, "and ye're all turned round like teetotums by him."

"I'll not listen to you any more," says my brother, getting pompous like in his anger. "If my sister is the only one in these parts as don't respect my understanding, and calls me and my friends fools, I'll not listen to her,"—and George walked off to tell it all to Sally.

I had lost my chance of doing any good with George, so I got over the stile to look for Bessie.

By the dairy-door I saw her pail and her blue-check apron, but she was not inside. I thought of the orchard; and amongst the apple-trees, where the red fruit glowed amongst the green leaves and the evening light shone mellow, I saw her. Mr Ellis

was there too, but his back was turned to me, so I could not see his face.

Bessie was moving restlessly about like last night. Her head was thrown back, her breast was heaving. She seemed to be stifling amongst the fresh leaves and the meadow grass. Her eyes burned like flames. There was anger and despair in her look.

"Nay, sir," I heard her say quickly, "we Carbeck girls keep our word. We bide by it. I've promised Bill. If ye would go, sir, I would thank ye. If ye would but go, sir—if ye would but go."

That is all I heard. I slank away, for I would not be an eavesdropper. Yes; my lassie was doing the right, brave thing! She was putting between herself and the strange man's love the promise she had given to Bill. It was a hard struggle. I could see it in the wild look on her face, but I kept saying to myself, "She is right; she'll overcome, for she's doing what is right—what an honest maid ought to do—and Bill will make it up to her—Bill, who is so good, and whose heart has loved her ever since she was a bairn, and never thought of any other lassie. He'll make it up to her!"

It was an evening made for love, it was so stealing soft. The sky was the colour of the yellow marigolds in spring, and the trees were like fast asleep, they were so quiet; their long shadows lay by the side of the light. The brooks gurgled; the

birds twittered, and flew in circles above; the grasses were singing with hidden grasshoppers. The world was singing itself to sleep. All the labourers and their wives were at their cottage-doors as I passed; they called out good-evening. The children were romping; their merry voices at play sounded on every side. I met some sweethearts lingering in the lanes. All were happy, while Bessie all alone was wrestling with the strong spirit of love, trying to overcome it by the remembrance of her promised word.

All night I could not get out of my heart the thought of my lassie's face so full of misery and appeal. I kept repeating that Bill would make it up to her; that this great London man would grow tired of her soon, and make her wretched, while that Bill would be faithful to her, like the sun is to the earth. For all I said it, I could only think of her wan despairing face, and keep remembering how it looked but a few weeks ago, like something made out of the sweet flowers and the sunshine.

Next morning I was so troubled I had no control over my thoughts. As I was churning butter the tears kept running down, and I was just foolishly wishing that Carbeck was an ugly place—that it was flat, with no lakes in it, or the Beck brawling over stones, so that Mr Ellis would never have cared to come to it, with his paints and his brushes, and his power of bringing sorrow to Bessie.

Suddenly a voice made me start.

"Who's that jackanapes at the farm?"

It was Mr Orwell. There he was standing, with his red face, his white necktie, his leather breeches, gruff as ever, and Sancho at his heels. His grey eyes were peering angrily at me. I was right down glad to see him. It was as if things were getting back to their old ways.

"Who is he?" again asked Mr Orwell, not giving me time to answer, or to say I was glad to see him. "I'm gone a month; I come back, and I find this painter fellow established there—the cock of the walk!—George Lang, like a sponge, imbibing his flatteries. Your brother has turned patron of the fine arts! 'Tis the most farcical sight I've seen in my whole life!"

Mr Orwell laughed and thumped the floor with his stick till all the pots rattled. But for all his laughing he looked angry.

"Who is he?" again he asked, looking at me fiercely through his shaggy eyebrows, as if I were responsible for Mr Ellis coming. "There's that girl Bessie, sitting with some leaves round her head for a picture which is as like her as it's like—like you. She looks as if she had gone daft. Can't you tell me who he is?"

"Well, sir, if ye'll let me speak. He's an artist come from London. His name is Mr Ellis, and he

has come on purpose to paint Carbeck and us in it, and George, out of kindness, has lent him a room at the top of his house to paint in!" I answered, packing all I knew into a short space.

All the while I spoke Mr Orwell was growling like an angry watch-dog, walking up and down, with his hands behind his back and his stick like a tail flapping between his legs.

"Paint Carbeck! Who wants Carbeck to be painted?" he asked, turning sharp round upon me, with a frown that made his grisly eyebrows meet. "Tut! if the fellow can daub something that's no more like what it's meant for than you're like that butter-dish, is that the reason for ye all to lose what wit ye have? A saucy rascal! He's gone and made love to Bessie, and she's forgotten Bill!"

"Oh, sir!" I cried, dropping my churn-stick, for it seemed to bring it home true to me, his saying it so plain, "Bessie 'll not forget Bill—she's trying to be faithful to him!".

"Tut!" said Mr Orwell, with a grim laugh; "like enough a woman will try to be faithful to a man who does not strut like a clown at a fair, when one who does comes across her!"

"Sir, ye're not fair to Bessie!" I exclaimed. "She keeps out of Mr Ellis's way. It is George as told me himself, she had not been near him yesterday!"

"Well, she's near him to-day then!" cried Mr Orwell, wheeling round again, and giving a thump with his stick to the floor—and there was something like sorrow with the fierceness in his eyes. "She's sitting for him, with some rhubarb leaves, or lettuce leaves, some green flummery round her head, and he's painting her, and each time he looks at her, she looks—she looks a fool."

"Sitting for Mr Ellis!" I cried, thinking of yester evening in the orchard, and what I had heard her say there.

"Come and see for yourself!" Mr Orwell said; and before I knew well what I was doing, the rector, I, and Sancho, were all going as quick as we could pace towards the farm.

It was the first time I had been inside the painting-room. I had kept away, to show my dislike of Mr Ellis. Sure enough, Bessie was sitting with a crown of vine leaves on her head, Mr Ellis was painting on his big picture, and George was looking on. The first look I gave her I felt something had happened. She was changed. It was as if she had drifted away. The hesitation that had clouded her frank face was gone, there was a look of resolution in it, but the brightness had not returned to it. It was a sad, decided face, that seemed looking at me from a long way off.

"I did not expect you, aunt," she said. "You have

never come in here before." And a shadow of defiance passed into her eyes as she looked from me to Mr Orwell.

"Never too many friends together," cried Mr Ellis, cheerily. He looked very handsome and clean. "How do you do, Mrs Martin, this fine morning? I've driven the bad weather from your country, I think; and here's my new and excellent friend, Mr Orwell!" Mr Orwell grunted. He had walked heavily over to the easel, and now pointing to the picture on it Mr Ellis was painting, "That's getting more and more unlike Bessie," he said.

"My good sir," replied Mr Ellis, laughing, and turning round palette in hand, "I'll sit humbly at your feet when you speak theology—I'll eat the dust before you when you treat of turnips and carrots—but on what belongs to art I'll not mind you. It is not to be expected that you should know anything about it. Now my friend here," pointing to George, sitting serious as a judge in his arm-chair, "has the eye and the feeling of an artist although he does not paint."

"Farmer Lang, an embryo artist!" laughed Mr Orwell, till all his fat body shook. "You know something of human nature, sir, you do, if you don't know much else."

I did not catch what George or the others said

just then, for I caught sight of a picture put up against the wall.

It was that of a girl coming down a lane in the twilight. The ground was wet, with patches of brightness and streaks of bronzy light. She was carrying a basket of linen on her head, one arm lifted holding it. Her dress was of dark cotton clinging to her. Behind her were dim trees and an evening sky. It was Bessie coming along. I had seen her a hundred times, with her linen basket on her head, tramping over the mud, but I had never known she was beautiful like this.

There she was, gladsome and healthy, with her active step, her firm figure. Around her the grey, wet world, the light striking on the white linen in the basket, and her lifted arm; her fearless eyes, that looked love, shining out of the shadow.

"You like that, Mrs Martin," said Mr Ellis behind me. "I'm glad you do. That is how I first saw your niece. I thought it was the winsome nixie of health and love coming towards me, when I spied her in the little lane behind the farm." He looked tenderly at Bessie, and she smiled back, like in a dream, at him.

"Bessie's a plain country lass, sir! No more a nixie than you're a god, sir! She's betrothed to a brave lad, and she ought not to be sitting there to you, with that green stuff round her head,"

Mr Orwell spoke out, giving a whack with his stick to the floor.

"Bessie's minding what I, her father, tell her," George said, with a vexed gurgle in his voice. "She's civil to my friends. I'm the first as minds that she's engaged to Bill, and I'd not bid her to sit if it were to wrong the lad. Sit still, Bessie," for Bessie had risen, and was standing up straight, flushed to the roots of her hair, her lips parted, her eyes full of speech.

"Sit down," said Mr Ellis, standing up too; "I've not done with you." A strife of looks passed between the two: it only lasted a minute, and then Bessie sat down.

"I'll paint a picture when I get home," said Mr Ellis, standing in front of Bessie, so that she was hid. He looked flurried, although he spoke cheerily as ever. "An enchanted princess, a valley hedged round by mountains, cutting the sky like granite walls. My friend, here," putting his hand on George's shoulder, "will be the king of the spellbound domain. I'll put my heart into my brushes to paint him. This other friend," looking at me, "will be the canny fairy, spinning always, and watching strangers with suspicious eyes. And you, sir—and you," laughing disagreeably, "I'll paint as one of those beings reserved till now to fiction — you're a scholar, sir, and know who I

mean—down to the throat," putting his hand under his neck-tie, "a man, and the legs—why, the legs—sylvan legs."

"Your wit, sir, is no more pleasant to me than your manners," said Mr Orwell, huffily. "Good day, farmer Lang. Your house is being pulled about your ears, and you are helping to pull it down." And away he trudged, followed by Sancho. We could hear him grumbling to himself, and occasionally thumping the ground with his stick.

"Queer old satyr," said Mr Ellis, looking after him and laughing. "Down to the throat a parson, and farmer the rest of his body."

"I always said the rector was a cranky man, as thinks he has eyes that see more things than others, when it is because the things are not there to see," remarked George. But his usually placid voice was ruffled, and he rubbed the arms of his chair fretfully up and down.

"You must not let yourself be led by him, my friend," said Mr Ellis, bending towards my brother. "Those parsons like to have you under their thumb. It is matter of history. They've always tried to meddle in families, and take the place of the master of the house. You've more sense in one ounce of your brain than he has in all his body."

"Nay, nay, I'll not be led by him," said George, more happily. "And now I'll go and look after the

farm-lads. And you, Bessie, you keep where you are. Just you mind your father, and no one else."

Bessie did not answer. She had not said a word or moved, after she had risen so suddenly that time, but she had sat still like a statue.

As soon as George had left the room, Mr Ellis turned and smiled on her. I thought I would stay and watch Bessie a little, so I ran down to get Sally to give me some knitting to do. I left the door open behind me, and coming back, I overheard Mr Ellis say—

"My child, give me your hand;" and she gave it, looking up, like asking him a sad question. He held it tight, not minding me looking and listening. "Guess where I've been this morning?" he asked, brightly, looking down on her. "I've been to old Smith's cottage; and do you know what I saw? Guess! There was the red rose in front of his door, big as a saucer. The honeysuckle on his porch is so thick in bloom, you cannot see the leaves for flowers. And, do you know, all the time it was only your pretty lips I saw, and your dainty fingers. The lusty autumn life was stirring everywhere. Everything was full of bloom, of colour, and it was you —you!—young thing, I remembered!" and pressing her hand tighter, he dropped it, still smiling on her, with the bright, warm smile. "What business have you," he went on, "to stand between me and

my autumn sunshine like that? In London I take it happily, and at my ease; and here you come between me and everything!" It was in scolding tones he spoke, but his eyes caressed her face. I saw the rigid look pass from it, and a moist brightness fill her eyes.

"Now, you are good again," he said, with tender approbation, "so I'll sing to you;" and, never removing his gaze from her, he sang "My Highland Mary."

Something had happened—something I could not guess at, and Bessie avoided my glance, so I could not read it in her face.

As Mr Ellis was singing, the door opened abruptly, unexpectedly, and Mr Orwell put in his head. "Come here," he said, beckoning to me, impatiently; "I want to speak to you."

As I stood outside the door, I noticed he had a red comforter round his neck. His overcoat was of a lighter shade, and shorter than his brown coat underneath. He carried a stouter stick than his usual one, and a bag. Sancho was not with him. Mr Orwell had on his travelling costume. "I'm going for Bill," he said,—"going at once. I'll meet the London coach. If the lad cares for that girl, he had better come down to look after her himself. I'm going to London for him. He'll be here in four or five days at most."

"Don't tell them!" he said, grasping tight my wrist, and looking earnestly at me with his shaggy eyes, that were sadder than I had ever seen them. "Say naught about it to Bessie or any other. They'd have a story pat ready with which to deceive the lad;" and he was gone.

I could have fallen on my knees to thank him. It seemed still to me that all must come right when Bill was back.

I could not get to have a word with Bessie. Mr Ellis kept near her, and she seemed wilful to keep aloof from me; but once looking up suddenly, I caught my lassie's eyes fixed on me in a sort of scared and pitying way.

CHAPTER XV.

I SAW nothing of Bessie for days. If I went to the farm, Mr Ellis kept near her, and she did not come to me. On the fourth night, I was sitting by the fire, for the bad weather had set in again. It was the beginning of the gusty season, and the wind whistled and howled against the house and round the mountains. I was saying to myself that Bill would come on the morrow, and then, that matters would right themselves, and be like what they were before, when the door opened, and Bessie came in by herself, just as in the old times, only she was not singing. I almost jumped out of my chair with gladness at seeing her enter familiar-like.

Bessie kissed me on the forehead, but she slipped quickly out of my arms. She seemed especially vivacious, talking fast, and giving me no time to say a word; and when I could put in a question, she gave queer answers, all astray. All the time, she kept arranging little things about the room, going

quickly from one to the other, so that her face was turned from me. But once or twice I caught her giving me curious, yearning glances.

Talking excitedly, she told me how on her way she had met farmer Smith, trudging through the mud, and that she had helped him to look for his spectacles the wind had blown off. "It requires spectacles to look for spectacles," said Bessie, with a laugh that sounded harsh; "and he could not see them, sticking in the slush, just under his nose." Then, in the same restless way, giving me at times those anxious, wistful looks, so different from her chatter, she went on to tell me all the things the old farmer had said to her, and how his son was going to Edinburgh to be a great scholar.

"Going!" I exclaimed, interrupting her,—"I thought he was gone."

"Gone? Yes; he went this morning," answered Bessie, in an altered voice, looking strangely and suspiciously at me.

Then seeing my astonished face, she became confused, and turned scarlet. "Oh I forgot, it was of farmer Smith's son we were talking. He's gone ever so long ago," she blundered out.

Before I could answer, she had plunged again into talk, pulling the screen behind me, so as to shelter me better. "We're going to have a cold winter, aunt," she said. "Farmer Smith says so on account

of the berries on the holly trees. But he's always croaking. I'm sure," with a laugh and a sob, "he and Mr Horton have good times talking of what's miserable. I don't believe in the berries meaning anything. Once, I remember I threaded so many Bill ga——" Then she paused abruptly.

Her rambling talk, her wild answers, and the yearning looks she cast on me, puzzled me.

"My bairn," I said, "never mind the winter. Leave the things—they'll not be spirited away. The winter will not seem long or bitter when you're near me, and I see you happy, my bairn!"

Bessie remained irresolute, then turned away.

"I want to look at something in my room," she answered quickly, going to the door.

"Nay, nay, lassie," I said, "come to me," and I stretched out my hand to her.

She hesitated still, then she came and knelt beside me, looking up at me. It suddenly came home to me how altered she was. It was Bessie's face, but it was different as is the same place on a winter and a summer day. It was dreary and wan, only her eyes seemed to be burning the light that used to shimmer over her features, and they had such a far-away look, I could have fancied it was Bessie's spirit in them I saw. We remained silent both of us. I seemed to understand for the first time how much she had suffered, and I knew her restless ways, her

anxious looks just now, came from her resolution to remain faithful to Bill. There was a lump in my throat, so that I could not speak.

"I do love this dear old room!" said Bessie, looking lingeringly round it. Then springing to her feet, she walked about it slowly, and I noticed that she began softly to touch everything, and, stopping by my spinning-wheel and chair, she stroked them with her hand.

"Why, Bessie, what are you doing, child?" I asked, feeling something uncanny in her doing this. "You seem to be looking and touching those things as if they were alive."

"Well, they are alive to me!" she answered in a petulant voice that again sounded like choked by a sob. "Nice old chair and wheel!" she went on, still stroking them. "Always in their old place by the window," and she looked intently at them as she had looked at me. "And there's that grey wool stocking you have not finished knitting yet. I'll take it, auntie, to punish you for your laziness," and she rolled it up quickly and put it into her pocket.

"Bessie," I cried impatiently, "put it back!"

"Nay, I won't," she answered, shaking her head, with a shake that seemed a lifeless imitation of her old bright way. "I'll keep it. We've not been so loving as we used to, and so I'll keep this grey stocking, with the four needles stuck into it, just as they

are, as a remembrance of the old way in which you used to love me."

"Child!" I cried, with the love rushing over my heart, "there's no old way. It was the stranger came between us. Where is he to-night?"

"He's gone!" answered Bessie, under her breath; and coming to me, she lay down on the floor at my feet, and put her head down on my lap.

"Gone! gone! when?"

"This morning!" she whispered. Then I knew it was of Mr Ellis she had spoken that time I asked her of farmer Smith's son.

I could not say one word aloud for thankfulness. It was like waking out of a dreadful dream, to find myself in my bed, and the sunlight shining in through my window. I could not say a word, but my heart said, "Thank God for that!—thank God!"

I kept stroking Bessie's pretty shining hair, just like the poor man might have stroked his ewe lamb given back to him; and I asked myself, must I tell my lassie, lying so still by the fire, that Bill will be here to-morrow?

When I felt as if I could speak sense, I stooped and looked at Bessie, and then I saw that she was crying quietly.

"Poor bairn!" I thought. "She is weeping the evil love out of her heart. By-and-by, when the

tears are wept out, she'll prize Bill's true heart all the more for having stuck to him through temptation." "Bessie," I said after a bit, "I heard what you said to Mr Ellis in the orchard."

"You heard!" cried Bessie, sitting up quickly and looking at me with wide open eyes, round with what seemed like fear. The tears stopped falling, but still hung on her lashes and filled her eyes.

"I heard you say, Bessie, as all the Carbeck girls bide by their word. And you would thank him to go away from you. I would not be an eavesdropper, so I went away. But it was bravely said. I was proud of you, lassie!"

Bessie looked anxiously at me, and with a great blush, for nearly a minute. "I'm glad you heard me say that," she said, slowly. "You'll think of it sometimes, if—if ever you feel angry with me. You will—— Those Carbeck girls," she continued, after a pause, with a defiant look, that sometimes came over her bright face, and a bitter expression, that had never been on it before, "they would be hard on one as would break from the old ways. They would not have one kind word amongst them all for her."

"Never mind the Carbeck girls," I replied. "No blame to them if they are proud of their ways; they are good ways."

"They would be harder upon her than the Phari-

sees," Bessie went on, "who brought the poor woman to Christ, for these had some sins to soften their hearts."

"'Tis an ill wish, Bessie, to want the Carbeck girls to be like the Pharisees, let alone the woman. I hope I may be dead and gone against that comes to pass."

Bessie did not answer, but she put her head down again on my lap, and when I stooped and looked, I saw the tears still silently trickling down her cheeks.

I could not bide to see my lassie cry like that, so I thought I would tell her of Bill. I found it hard to say, and I was pondering how I would begin, when the door opened suddenly, and there Bill stood himself, looking in at us. On his face lay such a broad, steady beam of happiness, it brightened all the dark doorway.

Bessie started like a hare out of its form when it hears a shot.

"You here to-night!" she said, with a gasp.

It was strange to look at the two faces turned one to the other. Bill's so bright, and full of expectation; Bessie's so scared and white.

Then she turned and looked suspiciously at me. "You knew he was coming; you expected him!"

"Yes, I expected Bill," I replied, "but only to-morrow."

"Mr Orwell came," said Bill, coming nearer. At

the first look at Bessie, and at her first words, the brightness had begun to fade from his face. He seemed bewildered, as if he felt but could not believe how different her greeting was from what he had expected. His wistful eyes never stirred from her face. They were laying wait for the first gleam of welcome that would shine on it. "He got a holiday for me from Mr Stephenson. My holiday is to be near you, Bessie, so I worked hard to make it long as I could. I took the first coach that went north. It started half-an-hour after I knew I could get off. I did not stay to pack; I came off without any luggage. And then a passenger I made friends with inside gave me a lift in a carriage that was waiting for him, and then I walked the rest of the way. I walked fast, I can tell you," said Bill, trying to laugh, still watching yearningly for that gleam of welcome.

But it did not come to Bessie's face, yet some of the strained expression of fear and suspicion passed away during Bill's explanation.

"You startled me, coming so unexpected," she said, quickly; "I thought it was your wraith standing there. Why did you not tell me he was coming?" darting another mistrustful glance at me.

"Why did I need tell you?" I answered, rather sharply; "a girl should be ready to greet her lover any moment he comes."

"Bessie, something has happened," said Bill, bringing his words out with difficulty; "something that has taken all the gladness out of your heart at seeing me."

"Nay, nay," she answered, hurriedly, turning her head away as if she could not meet his look, growing dimmer and dimmer with trouble, now no suspicion made her bold. "It is not that. I was startled; that was all. I thought it was your wraith standing there, looking at me from the doorway—it made me shiver." Then, with another flash of anger, throwing back her head, "It was like Mr Orwell to go for you. Do not look at me like that; there's nothing, I tell you."

"There's everything, Bessie," said Bill, still slowly, but with a deeper tremor in his voice, never removing his gaze from her. "A man need not be told something has happened to take away the bit of love that was beginning to grow for him in a woman's heart, when that bit of love makes the day of his life, and the taking away the night of it."

Here he stopped; but getting no answer, he stumbled on, drawing a step nearer, and a flash crossing his face as if a candle had passed quickly before it.

"Do you think, when all the being of him yearns for her, like the needle for the polar star, you can

cheat him, any more than it? When he remembers every look she ever gave him, so that when he's at work, hand and brain, still they are in his heart, watching him. Do you think," and his voice trembled, "you can cheat him, and say this look is one thing, when it means another?"

Bessie cowered before Bill. Suddenly she raised her face; it was white and worn, but it was the old face, with the frank look in the eyes again. "Yes, Bill," she said, "there is something — something I have tried to help, but could not. Ye must try to forgive me, you must. Do not ask me now. Oh, don't look at me like that!" for Bill had grown to seem old suddenly —a grey tinge was over his face. "I'll go now. Nay; I'll go alone. I *must* go alone. I *cannot bear* you to come with me!" She spoke so fast that the words stumbled against each other.

She had reached the door, and was standing in the open doorway. The wind was blowing about her skirts in tormented folds, and lifting her kerchief above her head. She was pale, skeery like the night; looks of pity, entreaty, and fear hurried over her face, as if all the feelings of her soul were driving past, like clouds driven by the storm. And yet, for all that, she looked so slim and child-like standing there.

"I must know that something that has robbed

you from me!" cried Bill, with a sudden burst of passion, following her.

"Oh, to-morrow — to-morrow you'll know!" panted Bessie, from the doorway. Then quickly she glanced round the room, at Bill, at me; the door banged, and she was gone.

Bill made a quick step forward. He was white and limp, like a flock of new-spun wool. "Lad," I said, "now you're home it will all come right; never fear—never fear. You must have patience with her; she's but a bairn. A girl's heart may have a moment's forgetfulness of her lover, when he's gone away, and hearing so seldom. 'Tis but a cloud come between the lake and the sky. Sit down and I'll tell you what——"

"Nay!" said Bill, harshly, putting up his hand as if to prevent my striking him. "Bessie will tell me. I'll hear it from none else but her. She must tell me to-morrow."

Then, as he reached the door, he turned. "'Tis no cloud; 'tis that somewhat has happened that has taken the bit of love, root and branches, out of her heart for me, and I've *lost* her."

Scarce had the words left his lips than the door flew open again, and in rushed Bessie once more. "Oh, aunt, keep me—keep me near you to-night!" she cried, flinging herself down at my feet and clinging to me.

How shall I describe her face, raised to mine, so forlorn and piteous it was? She clung to me as seeking refuge against death itself.

"Darling!" I cried, putting my arms about her neck, "it's for me to be joyful when I know you're sleeping in the room next to mine. It's like feeling a blessing near me."

She did not heed my words, but only clung to me close, trembling in every limb.

"Bill, hold me—hold my hand!" she cried, with wailing peevishness, as she saw him standing near her.

He took hold of it at once and held it tight, clutching it between his own two hands.

We all three sat in silence, Bill and I watching Bessie, who cowered between us, and I noticed she kept watching the clock with restless glances all the time. When it was on the stroke of nine, "Bill," she said, shivering, "go home and tell them I'm keeping near aunt to-night."

He moved to go at once, but before rising he took hold of her face between his two hands and turning it upwards gazed down into it, as if he were passionately seeking to read on it the secret of those past weeks. How child-like it looked, the wan, beautiful face encircled by his strong working hands. The misery on it seemed to make its youth more striking. The eyes, so strangely bright, looked up dazed

into his. They questioned him as much as he questioned them.

Their piteousness softened all the anger out of his heart; for after looking into them with a low exclamation of pity, he stooped and kissed her forehead. Then he rose quickly and left us.

After he was gone, Bessie moved nearer still to me. One hand lay clutched on my lap. She seemed to be watching and hearkening to something far away, and each time she glanced towards the clock she crept a little closer still. At last, as if she could bear it no longer, she got up and moved about the room restlessly.

"Don't you think, lassie, it's high time to go to bed?" I asked, trying to talk briskly, when ten o'clock struck.

"Oh no, aunt, no, not yet; don't go to bed yet—stop up with me a little longer," she said. Suddenly pausing in her walk, her mood changed; she came towards me.

"You *must* stop up with me, aunt—you must," and taking her footstool, Bessie sat herself snugly down, and began talking against time. There was a dear piteous little artifice about it that almost took me in.

"Don't you like sitting up, sometimes?" she asked. "I do; it's like sitting up to see the old year out and the new year in. Farmer Greene told father such a funny story to-day about a friend of his

who lives north who's a widower and is very old, and lives in a cottage all by himself. Last new-year's eve he waited to see the old year out, and he laid out his supper to eat it, the first thing in the new year, and he left his door ajar."

"A quarter past ten, Bessie, a quarter past ten, and it's not new-year's eve—it's not the last day of the year," I said.

"Well, maybe it's a kind of last day of the year to me. I've a fancy to keep it so, aunt. I want to bury it, and you must sit up with me till twelve to help me bury it. It's a fancy—and—and—listen about the old man. He fell asleep just at twenty minutes to twelve, and when he awoke, it was morning, his joints were quite stiff with rheumatism; his—his leg of pork was gone, and his mug of ale was spilt. But the funniest part was," said Bessie, laughing shrilly, "that he said it was the hobgoblins had carried off the pork, and had spilt his mug of ale; he did not mind the hobgoblins doing it, but was very angry when we said it was only the neighbour's dog."

"Well, Bessie," said I, giving in to her mood, "since you won't go to bed, let's make a blaze," and I poked the fire and made the shadows fly up.

"Oh yes! I like a blaze," said Bessie, squatting more cosily forward, and stretching out her hands to the flames. "It's so cheery." Then she went on to

tell me some village gossip—how one of the girls was going to be married. But all the time of her bright chatter, her eyes kept wandering towards the clock.

"I knew quite well Sally Green would marry shoemaker Beale, for she saw his face nodding down to her from the ceiling on Hallows' eve, and you always marry him who nods to you then."

"Nonsense, Bessie," I said, almost deceived by her poor little cunning, and yet feeling her merriment was forced.

"No nonsense at all!" said Bessie, "not at all," with a quick glance towards the clock.

"I'll tell you the story of how we sat up last Hallows' eve," and then she rattled on, describing how three of them had sat up in the fire-light, each with an apple, and at the last bite they were to see their husbands.

"But after the very first bite of my apple," said Bessie, merrily, "I pitched it into the fire and hid my face in my apron. I would not have looked round for the world. I felt as if a hundred ghosts were pressing up against my back, and Janie had no courage at all; but Sally munched her apple to the end, and looked up, and after that she gave a scream, for up on the ceiling there was a face with a hooked nose and a pair of spectacles."

"Eh, lassie!" I said, making a pretence of laughing, "I'll wager to cover the ceiling with any amount

of hook noses and pairs of spectacles, if you but give me a chair or two, with a cloth thrown across their backs, and a good fire to throw shadows up on the ceiling."

When I laughed, Bessie laughed also, with a laugh that grated on my heart. "Oh yes, I've seen heaps of shoemaker Beale's side faces since bobbing on the ceiling; but that's how Sally has come to marrying him. No girl would marry him otherwise. With his hooked nose and retreating chin, he looks like an —an offended hen."

Thus she went on chattering, always like against time. The later it grew the merrier grew her talk. But after the clock had struck eleven, her cheeks that had flushed when she first grew merry lost their colour. It all faded out till, in the fire-light, her face and lips grew so pale that only her restless eyes, watching the clock, seemed living. There was something weird in that wan face and those gleaming eyes. Still she talked on.

At last, the side-door of the clock flew open, and cuckoo stepped out, calling out twelve times; then all her pretty hypocrisy left my poor darling, and hiding her face in my lap, she sobbed.

I put my hands on her head, and wept for sympathy with her; but all the time I cried, there was a feeling in my heart as if some peril or grief had passed over us.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next two days Bessie remained with me. She was pale, as if coming out of a great illness; she seemed so bewildered, too. She went about noiseless and patient, doing her accustomed work; but if it were not for her eyes, with that look of the elf always there, and that no misery could take out of them, you would not have known her face to be Bessie's. All the roundness of her cheeks was gone, and the dimples.

She only spoke when we spoke to her, and then she answered gently, but often in a startled way, as if her thoughts had wandered far away, and it was difficult for her to collect them. She was very kind to Bill—far kinder and meeker than she used to be, before he went away. She would let him sit by her and hold her hand, and she did not stir or blush or make any sign when he kissed her. And when he brought her the late autumn flowers—little nosegays of chrysanthemums, with some bright leaves

tied round them, she took them, holding them carefully—*too* carefully, as if it was an effort to remember. Not a look of hers escaped Bill, and he guessed the reason of her gentleness.

"You promised to tell me," said Bill, next morning, as he sat near her, holding her hand, and looking wistfully at her. "I think, my darling, you will feel easier when you have told me your sorrow." Then, speaking slowly, and stroking her hand gently, "Whatever it is, I'll bear it; and if you could shove it off from your heart to mine, I'll bear it. You see I'm stronger than you, Bessie. If you'll but try me, maybe I can point out the way to you to do it, that you cannot see."

"There's nothing happened now; it's over," said Bessie, looking round at him.

It was not long before Bill heard all about Mr Ellis. The country folk were full of his cleverness, and of his kind, grand ways.

"It's he who has done it. It's he who has come and stolen away her heart. He's taken away her very soul, and now he's left her," said Bill, a grey pallor spreading over his knit forehead and face; his clenched hand quivering, as it lay on his knee.

"Oh, Bill, you must bear with her," I said. "She's but a bairn, after all. He was always after her, with his stories, his ballads, and painting, never letting her alone, minding all her little joys and

sorrows, as if he had no thought but for them. 'Tis no wonder, you so far away, she grew to care for him more than she ought. But she struggled against it. She was always speaking up for you when he like laughed at you. I heard her with my own ears asking him to go away. Lad, if you will but have patience, you'll make her forget him. 'Tis her fancy, I take it, is more in need of him than her heart. If you'll but persevere, you'll make her our own bright Bessie again, by your love."

"If love can make her happy yet," said Bill, slowly, drawing in his breath, "God knows I love her enough, and I'd have patience enough, and I would not care what misery should come to me, if I could only see her gladsome again; but it just kills me to see her so pale and wistful looking, as if her heart was dead within her, and it was only her body was alive."

"'Twas ill-luck," I cried, "that brought him to Carbeck. But, lad, you'll undo the work he's done by your love, if you'll try. 'Tis not I as will not think that a good man's not stronger than an evil man, when both are pitted against each other. It's not like the Lord would not back the one that is good. What's the use of the stories in the Bible—David and Goliath, and Elijah and the priests of Baal—if it's not to show that?"

Bill did not answer at first, but after a while he

turned towards me, and said, very slow, looking curiously at me, "You think my love can make her happy yet? If I go on, not minding her sad looks, not letting my heart break from misery at her loving another, you think one day, by dint of hedging her round with love" (and unconsciously he lifted his arm and hitched it round, as if he were encircling her life), "by studying her fancies—giving her all the books of ballads and all the pictures I can buy,—you think one day some of her gladsomeness will come back?"

"Eh, lad, I know it!" I cried; "and it's a good plan that of buying the ballads and pictures. And he was always telling her of other countries, trying to put her out of conceit with her home." And I told him of the blue cave, and the city on the water, where there were no waggons, or horses, or paths.

"I'll take her to other countries," said Bill. "I'll make money, and it's not he who could give her more than I shall by-and-by." A gleam of hope shot into his eyes, and he straightened his back, as one who sets about a task he means to accomplish.

That evening, as we all three sat by the fire, and Bill watched Bessie, some of the bitter hopelessness stole over his face again. She had taken up her knitting, as usual, but every minute the needles had dropped into her lap, and while I talked to Bill

about farm matters, and gossipped to him about his mother, she lay back in her chair, her hands clasped over her knees, looking into the fire. There were no tears in her eyes, but they looked heavy, and very weary, and the corners of her mouth drooped, as if she could never laugh or smile again.

"Bessie, you look so tired, you ought to go to bed!" said Bill, sharply, getting up, as if he could not bear the sight of her any longer.

For the first time she seemed to notice the suffering in his face. A flush rose to hers, and she sat up, looking up at him with a sort of hesitating wonder. "Why do you look like that? Are you not happy? You *must* be happy. I am going to marry you; you must be happy!"

She had spoken slowly at first, but the last words came quickly, and in an exacting tone, as if she had a right to his happiness.

"How can I be happy when I see you so sad?" he answered.

"But *you* must be happy," she repeated, sitting up straight, and her lips trembling. "*You* must; *you've* no right to be sad. I'm going to marry you, and you ought to be happy."

"Yes, Bessie, I shall be happy," said Bill, resolutely, sitting by her side, and laying hold of her hand; "for when I am married to you, you see, I can take such care of you, and buy you all the

pretty things you like. There's not a thing you take a fancy to I'll not work head and hand to get for you. And look here, I'll win you over yet! We'll travel. We'll see all the countries you wish to see—Venice!—the blue cave!—Rome!" he said, with a crowing laugh, and a flourish of his hand. Then, as if his very soul rushed to his lips, he said, with a burst, "I love you so much, I must make you happy. I feel it—I know it—that my great love must make you happy some day. It cannot be but that my love must make you happy."

"Will you take me away from this soon?" asked Bessie, with a sort of comfort, the first that had come into her eyes. "Oh! that is all I want! I want to go away!"

"But, dear, my work lies in the sooty cities," answered Bill, ponderingly, looking into her face. "Very far" (here he seemed to want a word), "from the mountains," he gasped, "where it's only as a treat you can get a peep of the blue sky. It's scarce a place to take you to. Lirple is a rare place for grimy smoke." Then, watching her, as if lying in ambush for a sign the past was not quite forgot, "I think it's time for me to begin building the cottage that's to grow like a fairy palace on the Coniston Old Man's Back. Do you remember the story that all came out of your fanciful little head, about the palace, and the diamond necklace, and

the friends I'll bring to sup there one stormy night?"

"Oh, don't mind me of that time," said Bessie, quickly, drawing her hand away. "I want to go away now. The sight of the mountains hurts me here;" and she pressed her hand with a passionate gesture to her heart. "I want to go away far — very far from them — somewhere to the fens, I'd like."

"We'll go where you will. To comfort you is the only care I have in life," said Bill, with solemn patience in his voice.

From my corner, I wondered at his great love, his simple, unselfish love, that never winced or gave sign of jealousy.

"Then, I want to go away. Oh! I want to go away! I want you to take me away from here soon," said Bessie, restlessly.

"Do you mean," said Bill, so quietly, I felt the quiet was put on, not to let her see how all his feelings were stirred at the thought of wedding her so soon, "that you would like us to be married before my holidays are over?"

"I want to go away. I want to go. I want you to take me with you, Bill, that is all I want," repeated Bessie, looking up at him with bewildered, eager eyes, as if that was the only wish she could form.

"Next Sunday," said Bill, in the same quiet tone, all his body drawn up as if he were going to wrestle or fight for his life, "our names can be put up in church, and the next two Sundays, and then we can be married on the morrow of the third Sunday."

"Yes," said Bessie, with a little sob; "and you'll be happy when we're married."

"I shall—perhaps," replied Bill, stroking back her hair, and looking steadfastly down at her, "for I know the day must come when my love will make you happy too."

There was quite a hubbub in Carbeck when the news spread that Bessie and Bill would be married immediately. It put the thought of Mr Ellis out of the good people's heads. All the neighbours flocked in during the day to chatter with me about the news. There was not a word against it. It was a good thing for Bill, they all said. It was ill for a lad to live alone; no one to fend for him, or greet him with a cheery smile when he came home tired after his work, and cook him a bit of his favourite victual. There never were long engagements at Carbeck. When a lad could earn his living he married the girl he loved best, and it had always turned out right. There never had been known an unhappy marriage amongst us, although some folk did say the rector had not been over-lucky that way. Folk should be ashamed of them-

selves who were unhappily married; they ought to have thought of what made a difference between them before. Sure, it was no harm a squabble now and then, it made life more hard and wholesome; but no man and wife in Carbeck had yet wished the knot untied that bound them. And Bill and Bessie now were going to be married, and all the neighbours were pleased.

"You look a bit pale, lassie — are you ailing?" said one of the women, looking at Bessie, who was going about dusting the room.

"I think I'm tired," replied Bessie, flushing and looking startled.

"Well, you've a right to be tired, no doubt. You've got to work to get things ready in a hurry, and you've got to think of a heap of things. I know I felt just like as if everything was going round and round the month before I married my good man!" and all the women laughed and talked of their feelings before their marriage.

George was like the rest of Carbeck, he approved of early marriages. "Never too young to be happy," he said. Early in the morning he had come over from his farm. For all his contentment, his eyes were misty when he greeted Bessie, and he puffed a little before he said, "Well, my lassie, Bill has been with me this morning, and he tells me you both are in as great a hurry to marry as the birds

on St Valentine's day. It's not for me to say aught to it. He's a good lad, is Bill. I've naught to say against him. There are richer lads here, but I'm not one of those that think there is nothing so good as riches. Maybe there are better things than money, though money brings a heap of things to a man, I don't deny. He's a canny lad; the rector and Mr Stephenson have a great idea of his canniness. And I have naught to say against him. And he's got a good heart. There never was a better son; and I always say a good son makes a good husband. It's like a fair spring making a good autumn. You never go wrong in a husband, when you get one who was a good son first. That's what I always say, and I've never found myself wrong yet." Then laughing, George went on, "Bless you, it was as easy to see as poppies in the corn that he loved you when he was no higher than yon table."

Bessie had taken a stool and was sitting at George's feet, her two hands clasping his arm, and her head was laid against it. She did not answer, and as I did not speak either, George went on after a pause, looking straight ahead of him. The thumb of the hand Bessie was not holding was thrust into his waistcoat arm-hole, and he was playing a ra-ta-ta-tam with his fingers on his portly chest.

"There were two, whose names I'll not mention, who had ill thoughts of you, Bessie. They thought

you were ready to care for a stranger, because he said some civil words to you, when you had passed your word to an honest lad of your own village; but I knew you better, lassie—I knew you better. I knew you would not do what the lowliest lass in Carbeck would not disgrace herself by doing. Nay, do not start, Bessie—I never doubted you, never a minute. I would have no ill thoughts, either, of a gentleman who behaved in the fire like as if he were a born general, no more flinching or losing his head. I was not likely to think ill of such a gentleman, who was my friend. You may be too penetrating, I say. There are some folk have so much penetration they'd make a hole through a wall, when the door is standing right open for them to pass through." George kept looking away from me all the time he spoke, but I felt as if the side of his body turned to me was covered with eyes blinking severely at me.

"You're glad I'm going to marry Bill, father?" asked Bessie, looking up at him.

"Yes, lassie, that I am, though it seems quick work; and the farm will never be the same again, that it never will, when you are gone. Eh, lassie! I'll miss you sorely," said George, disengaging his arm from Bessie's clasp, and stroking her head with his hand; "but it's only natural you and Bill should be in a hurry to marry, and right you should look

happy now the day is fixed. I'm glad of it; we old folk were in our day. Why! I did not leave your mother an hour's peace, when once she said she would have me. It was always, "Fix the day, Bessie—fix the day, for I can't wait, and I'll die you don't. I'll die if you make me wait another month!" That's what I said to her. Your mother was just such another as you. You're a chip of the old block, Bessie. She was a sunbeam in the house, that she was, my lassie. Although I have nothing to say against Sally, who has been a good wife to me these fourteen years. But the farm will never be the same to me again when you're gone, lassie!" continued George, in a trembling voice.

"And, father, you'll go on loving me when it's all over," said Bessie, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

"Since your mother died, I've loved none like you," said George, tenderly, "although you must not say so to Sally; but you must not cry. Eh, Bessie! a betrothed must not cry. We're going to have a feast, Bessie. Sally's promised to have things ready to-morrow for a supper as Carbeck has never tasted better, in honour of your betrothal. And I'm going round to bid the neighbours, and there will not be one left out as ought to be asked."

CHAPTER XVII.

NEXT day was the betrothal feast. Sally had had little time to prepare, but it was her boast she never could be taken by surprise. She was always ready. Short notice, too, exerted her faculties, and made the neighbours wonder at what she could do; so she was not averse to short notice. Give her twelve hours, and what with her cured hams, the best in Carbeck, her black puddings and pickled pork, her cheeses and jams, and home-brewed ale, as a base to work on, she could turn out delicate pasties, and substantial puddings, poultry and joints, roast and boiled, that would make George's long table groan, and the mouths of his guests water. Sally's suppers were always much thought of, and the neighbours, when asked to one, made it a point to starve all the day to do it the honour it deserved.

The day before and the morning of the betrothal Sally and her maids were not to be seen, but the

good folk watched the smoke coming out of the farm chimneys, and already saw in the volume of it that rose, the good cheer preparing for them.

The evening came, and at four o'clock we went to the farm, whither Bessie had returned in the morning.

After tea, that was not substantial enough to spoil the supper, the evening began with dancing in the barn that had been got ready for it, and was all lit up. Some chairs were placed along the walls for the elder folk; but most of us gathered in at the door to watch the young ones pacing to the tune of Jim Torrax's fiddle and farmer Grey's horn-pipe. Bessie stood up in "Sir Roger de Coverley" with Bill. You could see she tried to look merry, but the forced smile on her lips made her eyes look all the more piteous and dazed. She wore a white wool dress, with tiny blue spots, so far apart it looked all white. It was the dress George had brought back from the fair last December for her, to wear at the great party always given on Christmas Eve at the farm. There was no time for a new dress to be made up for to-night, so she wore the one she had worn last year; but Sally told us George had said the wedding-dress would be of real stiff brocaded silk. What a difference there was between the Bessie of last Christmas Eve and now! It was like watching a bird darting from branch to branch on a summer

day, or a lamb frisking in spring to watch Bessie's dancing that Christmas Eve. It made you understand the joy young limbs find in bounding to the sound of music, it was so active and gladsome. She was the life of the party that Christmas. To-night she was pale like the lilies floating on the tarns. Her step lagged in the dance. To meet the glance of her eye went to the heart like suddenly hearing a child's wail in the midst of laughter.

It was not long before the women about the door watching the dancers began to pass remarks upon her.

"She does not look brave, like a bride should, on her betrothal night," said one good soul. "I fear she's ailing. It would be bad luck if she were to be ill on her wedding-day, and the guests assembled, and the parson waiting with his surplice on, and she in bed, not able to stir. I wonder what ails her, poor lass! she seems like to drop every minute."

"Worse things than illness have kept a bride from the altar," said Mrs Compton, who always looked at things grimly, shaking her head, as her red-rimmed eyes followed Bessie. "Such things have not happened at Carbeck yet, but they may. I heard my mother's aunt tell a story of a bride who never came to the altar, although the guests were all in the church, and the parson and the bridegroom. She never came, though they waited

till past twelve, and it was no use waiting any more; not that day, nor any other day, did she come. That she never did."

"Why? What had happened?" asked all the women, under their breath.

"She was dead—that she was. When the bridegroom came to fetch her, he found her a corpse, though she had on her wedding-veil, and her stiff, brocaded silk. It's a true story—true as I'm standing here, for I heard my mother's aunt tell it, and she held it from her grandmother, who had a friend who was one of those in the church who waited—that she was," said Mrs Compton, wagging her head more and more, and still following Bessie with her eyes.

"Eh! you give us the dismals!" said Sally, shrilly, her eyes wide open with terror, and angry at such a story being told that could spoil her feast. "There's nothing ails Bessie."

"'Tis a foolish story you've told us, Mrs Compton," I said, "and one that ill fits a betrothal feast. 'Tis the thought of leaving her kith and kin that takes the colour out of the lassie's cheeks."

But although I spoke up bravely, Mrs Compton's tale gave me a creeping sensation, as if it were an ill omen.

"Well, well, maybe it is," said Mrs Compton, ruefully, never taking her eyes off Bessie.

The dancing all the time went on merrily, for all Mrs Compton's ghoulish story, and the bride's pale looks. The fiddle screamed, the horn-pipe went wild, and the feet kept time. Some of the old people joined, and danced as merrily, if not as lightly, as the young ones. It was a rollicking sight, such as a feast should be. All the farmers and their families were there, and Mr Orwell. In a corner, hugging a roll of paper, stood Mr Horton, saying little, but looking a world.

Very soon it oozed out in the company that he had written a poem for the occasion—a bridal song, which he would read at supper. There were five or six of the young men who belonged to the church choir, who looked important, too. It was said they knew the chorus.

At half-past eight was the supper, and it was laid out in the best kitchen. I suppose they called it a kitchen on account of the fireplace—eight feet deep, and as wide, but no cooking was ever done in it. It was only used for the supper-room on festive occasions. The oak wainscotings were the finest in Carbeck; thick oak rafters ran across the ceiling; the floor, also, was of oak, sanded over with beautiful white sand. In the chimney the logs of wood were piled high; the rafters were wreathed with holly and ivy, as at Christmas; and over Bessie's chair the neighbours' daughters

had placed tufts and garlands of white chrysanthemums.

It was a sight to see the old room—its dark panellings all alight and garlanded—the blaze of the wood-fire on the hearth—the supper-table loaded with Sally's best cheer. To accommodate all the guests, a cross table had been laid, and some side tables for the young people who could not find room at the centre one. At the head sat George, with a huge silver tankard in front of him. At his right hand was Bessie; next to her was Bill. At the foot sat Sally. Her honest face seemed brighter than the good old plate, scrubbed to its highest shining point.

Sally had surpassed herself, and all the guests said so, as they looked at the various kinds of pastries—at pork in every guise of hams, black pudding, sausages, and pies—at the impressive cheeses—at the turkeys and fowls lying waiting to be eaten. It was but natural that, at such a goodly sight, their already elated spirits should rise to a still higher pitch, to say nothing of the effect produced upon them by beholding the tankards of foaming ale the maids carried about, and the expectation of that steaming bowl of punch they knew from experience would follow.

The time had come now for those who were nimble of tongue—those who could make jokes and

puns. As the ale went round, if the jokes did not wax the wittier, they grew more frequent, and the laughter rolled and bubbled out. A shadow that had rested on George's broad countenance soon vanished now, and it was worth while watching his face disappearing and then reappearing from behind his silver tankard, and each time looking more satisfied with himself and every one else. Mr Orwell sat on Sally's right. His face was like the sun on a November sunset, round, red, genially content with the day's work. Mr Horton, with the roll of paper sticking out of his pocket, ate and drank in silence. To look at him made you expect something great was coming.

I still can see that long table—the good cheer on it fast disappearing—the men, women, and girls sitting round in their old-fashioned costumes, the men wearing long striped waistcoats, the women in short-waisted bodies and skirts, with no folds. I can see the broad laughter on every face—even Mrs Compton seemed to have left her grimness behind her at the door of the dancing-room. And it is curious to remember how like the faces seemed to one another. Surely some were plain and others well-featured; some looked kinder-hearted than others, but all had the same simple expression. The look of their childhood had not left them. Their mothers would have caught the open baby-look still

on each face, even on that of the oldest. Only Bessie was different from the others. It was like hitting on a puzzling bit in a plain book to look at her—like a beautiful verse in the Bible that is hard to understand, turn it which way you will, and which knocks at your heart with its difficulty.

When all the guests had eaten, most like more than was good for them, in honour of Bessie's betrothal, the remnants were cleared, and the bowl of punch, Sally's greatest achievement, smelling so fragrantly of thyme, green tea, and lemons, was brought in and set before George.

Then we knew the time had come for the speeches and the singing. Mr Horton's fingers clutched his roll of paper, and the servants clustered round the door. It was Mr Orwell's task to propose Bill's and Bessie's health, so we all looked towards the rector, as soon as the men had filled their glasses, and some of the elderly ladies had allowed a sip of the punch to be poured into theirs.

Mr Orwell was never one for making long speeches, not even in the pulpit, where he had a right to talk as long as he liked, and no one to say him nay or interrupt him. He did not say much to-night. Of course he reminded us as he had been the only one that had recognised Bill's genius. He always minded us of that on every occasion. Then, what with the smell of the punch, and partaking of supper,

it was impossible for Mr Orwell not to make jokes. He told us how Bessie and Bill had loved each other since they were toddling bairns. They had begun early. If it was the angels that made marriages, their guardian angels had settled it long ago between them, "And," went on Mr Orwell, looking round on the young men, "if one of you lads, when next Sunday I publish their banns, find objection, wishing Bessie for himself, I'll not mind him. I tell you distinctly I'll not mind him, not that Sunday, nor the next, nor the one after that, no, nor the following day, when the knot is to be tied—so he had better not do it." Of course we all laughed at the rector's joke. "And now," said Mr Orwell, lifting his glass high, "I say God bless them; and let us drink health, prosperity, and joy to the prettiest lass and the cleverest lad of Carbeck, on their betrothal night. Drink it with a full bumper, friends, and cheer three times three. Cheer to the echo; let the mountains hear you. Hip, hip, hurrah!" cried Mr Orwell, leading, and waving his hand above his head.

Then what a clamour there was! Bessie made me think of some dumb animal that is hunted, while the men cheered themselves hoarse, and some of the women in their excitement waved their pocket-handkerchiefs at her and Bill.

When the cheering was over came the time for

Mr Horton's poem. The six young men in the choir with a great clatter left their seats, and gathered behind him. We all grew silent. It was so wonderful that a real poem should be written by one of us. Farmer Grey, being hard of hearing, put his hand up to his ear in the form of a trumpet, not to lose a syllable, and every one bent forward. Mr Orwell watched Mr Horton from under his bushy eyebrows.

"'Tis a bridal song I've composed expressly for this auspicious occasion," said Mr Horton, standing up, and trying to look as if he were in the habit of writing a poem every day. "A bridal song in old times was called a—an—epi—pith——" Eh! I forget how he called it. It was a very long word. Even Mr Horton stumbled over it, and it must have been mighty long for him not to manage it. I have the poem in my drawer still. It is in six long verses, but I'll only give you the first.

Mr Horton slowly and solemnly unrolled his paper, and with his left hand uplifted, to call for silence, while we held our breath for excitement, he read, nodding his lanky head in time—

"To Hymen's altar here we bring
Two hearts that to each other cling.
No doves that coo on summer day
With love do languish more than they.
Lord, Thy blessings on them lay,
We, Thy servants, warmly pray."

Then the six young men in the choir burst out together—

> "On their marriage day
> The joy-bells will ring;
> With a clang they'll say—
> Ding-dong, ding-dong, ding."

"Eh, it's right down fine!" said Sally, looking down the table on her guests, as if she felt her supper glorified by this performance.

"Do you mean to say, Horton," demanded farmer Smith, severely, like cross-questioning him on oath, "as you've found out all the words that sound the same at the ends of the lines by yourself? That you've had no book to help you?"

"As the poem is, so I've written it, without book, or thought of what another wrote," said Mr Horton, laying his hand on his song, and looking round the company gravely, his mouth pursed up, his face creased like crumpled paper, to keep down his smile of triumph.

"We'll have to erect a statue to you on the village green, Horton, and inscribe it 'The bard of Carbeck,'" said Mr Orwell.

"I'm glad of your good opinion, sir. I might have written fuller and more musical if I had more time," replied Mr Horton, modestly, and pausing as if to consider his statue on the green. "The rhymes and the thoughts kept me awake all

night. They trotted in and out of my head, which way on my pillow I turned, so that I had to write. That's what is called inspiration."

"Yea, yea, that's inspiration," we all said to one another.

It was now Bill's turn to make a speech. He was not much of a one to talk in private, much less in public.

When he stood up he passed his hand through his hair two or three times, then he stumbled out, "Thank you, friends, thank you; and thank you, Mr Orwell, sir, for your kind wishes, and Mr Horton for his poem." Then he came to a stand-still, his brow knit. He looked straight before him with a resolute look, like facing something he saw. I seemed to see the words trembling on his lips. At last he said, slowly, almost doggedly, "If a man's love can make a girl happy—as it must, when it is so single and strong, nothing can hinder it—then I'll make Bessie happy."

He laid his hand on her shoulder at the last words, with a solemn gesture, like a man taking an oath. A whisper, "We know it, lad," ran round the room, but none cheered till he sat down.

Bessie remained so still, you might have thought she was turned to stone. Out of her wide-opened eyes the elf gazed piteous and scared, when Bill spoke and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

Bill had forgotten to propose George's health; and Jim Torrax, who sat next but one to him, had to nudge him and whisper so loud all the table could hear, before Bill, whose soul was in the words he had just said, could be made to understand. Then he stood up again, and said, simply, "I propose the health of our host and hostess, and God bless them both!"

Before we knew what he was about, Jim Torrax had whisked his fiddle from under the table, where he had hidden it, and he was scraping away at the tune—

> "For he's a jolly good fellow,
> And so say all of us."

No sooner had they caught it than all the guests joined hurry-scurry in the chorus. Eh, how lustily they sang it, at the top of their voices! George sat the image of portly satisfaction, while they stood singing it. He seemed to be drinking in the words.

Then came the cheers, and George's speech. I thought we would surely now have a long speech, for George was a rare one for talking, and looking at a matter on all its sides. I think he had prepared his speech, and learned it off by heart, his thanks at first came so pat and ponderous. He spoke in a slow, important way, like doling out his words; but very soon he, too, began to stumble, and then he could not pick himself up again. The more he

tried the more confused it got, like a tangled skein of cotton, which the more ye pull at, the more knotted it gets. At last he, too, gave up making a speech; but before sitting down he said, heartily, "Thank you all; and I'm glad to see you, friends, round my table; and the more you eat and the more you drink, the more you'll please my wife and me—that you will!"

On the strength of that, the men filled their glasses again, and Scotch whisky was handed round for those who preferred a steaming tumbler of grog to sips of punch. Some came back to their tankards of ale, and, of course, there was more cheering. After George had done speaking, the company's spirits rose to their highest pitch. Speech-making was over for the evening, and singing had begun in right earnest. Singing was fairer to folk who had feelings and liked to express them. Not every one could stand up and make a speech, but every one could sing. If you had not much of a voice, it did not signify in the chorus, you could always help to make it swell louder, which, after all, was what was needed. It was the chorus was the grand thing, coming with such a fine swing after the solos.

First Bob Tritchard, being the best voice in the choir, trolled out his great song:—

"There was a jolly miller
Lived on the river Dee."

. . . . .

And the company shouted the burden of the ballad :—

> "I care for nobody, no, not I,
> And nobody cares for me."

Then Jonathan Smith, who was facetious, followed with—

> "Oh dear! what can the matter be?
> Dear, dear! what can the matter be?"
>
> . . . . . .

All sang their favourite ditties, some comical, some sentimental; and when they had had enough of that, they took to glee-singing. The most admired was :—

> "Three jolly post-boys toasting at the Dragon,
> And they all determined,
> And they all determined,
> And they all determined to take another flagon;"

most of the company joining in. This was such a success, by universal consent it was sung twice over.

"The world would not be much but for the singing in it," said farmer Smith, wiping off the perspiration streaming from his forehead after the exertion.

"Nay, that it would not," agreed everybody, after a general partaking of a refreshing draught.

"And a tree, to my thinking, is little without the birds in it," continued farmer Smith, emboldened by the universal assent, "though, surely, they're not favourable to the crops; but that's principally the

sparrows and swallows and suchlike, as can scarcely bless themselves with a note. 'Tis not the throstles and mavis; and, bless them, if it were, 'tis not I as would grudge them their throatful of grain." Darting off from this general survey of birds, the good old man went on: "And I say Bill here is a lucky lad, for wherever Bill goes he'll carry his mavis with him to sing to him in weal and woe; for 'tis only saying what we all know, that Bessie's voice is the sweetest of all the lassies' here."

"Yea, it's as true—as true," every one said, looking towards Bessie, who to-night had not joined in the choruses.

"Sing to the company, Bessie," said George, proudly. "Sing 'The Maid of Cumberland.'"

"Yea, 'The Maid of Cumberland," we all echoed, for this simple song was the one Bessie sang sweetest last year.

Bessie stood up at once. These last three days she was very obedient. She had forgotten how to say nay. All her innocent coquetries she seemed to have forgotten.

She stood up, looking so slim in her white dress, against the dark oak panellings behind her. Above her were the white flowers. Her lace tucker disclosed her round throat, and her face thrown back still looked white as the water-lilies floating on the tarns.

This is the homely ballad she sang:—

"There was a maid of Cumberland,
  She met a lad of Fife;
He wooed her hard, he wooed her fair,
  That she should be his wife.

She didna care for him a wee,
  But she kenned herself a fool,
And so she waited what should be,
  Like lassie, just frae school.

And then she thought upon him hard,
  And wished to know him well.
He is an honest lad, she said,
  As all the country tell.

In sooth I have been deaf to him,
  To him I have been blind.
To me he has been true and leal,
  He has been blithe and kind.

To-morrow I will list to him,
  I will not say him nay.
But Jimmy touched her hand and said,
  Oh, hear me, dear, to-day!

She didna wait to hear him speak,
  She looked into his een,
And then the ither lad, she knew,
  He came no more between.

Eh, dear! and she did speak the troth.
  She loved nae mair——"

. . . . .

Here Bessie's voice, that had faltered at the last

lines, became a mutter, and with a gasp she broke down.

Last year Bessie had carolled the melody with innocent plaintiveness. To-night, as her voice floated keen and sweet about us, a vague expression as of wonder gathered on all the faces of the listeners. Through their ears their hearts had been stirred by the thrill of a new agony. For the first time there had come a dim sense to their simple understandings that bad crops and diseased cattle were not the only trouble of life, nor its only grief the deaths of our kith and kin.

Bill had stood up with Bessie, watching her with dog-like, faithful eyes. As she sang, the bitter sadness that had come to them when the first shock fell upon him, spread there again. It had been lifted by the assurance that had risen in his heart, that his great love would make her happy yet. I think we all felt—Bill clearly, I near as clear as he, and the homely folk around us gropingly—that Bessie had somehow drifted away from us,—that we never could bring bliss or sorrow to her again.

When Bessie broke down, there came a pause. We were listening to the new questionings of our hearts. Unconsciously I lifted my eyes towards the window, and there—was it fancy, was it real?—I saw the face of Mr Ellis looking in.

"Why, Mistress Martin, have you seen a ghost, that you start so?" asked Mr Orwell.

There was a flurry all about me. "What is it?" several asked, turning towards the window; "you look so scared!"

"I thought I saw some one looking in," I stammered.

"Nay," said George, with a ruffled countenance, for he too was under the impression of Bessie's singing, "all the guests that were bidden have come. 'Tis some farm-servant peeping in;" then trying to laugh, "we'll ask him in to drink to the betrothed couple's health."

Half-a-dozen of the lads went out to look round the house and about the grounds, but they came in presently, saying no one was about.

Very soon after the company separated. The guests tried to depart as jovially as they had come, but they could not succeed. Bill, widow Troughton, and I were the last to leave. A high wind had risen, sending masses of clouds over the face of the moon, that seemed to be running across the sky. One minute the night was pitch-dark, the next it was flooded with a surpassing radiance.

Not minding the roughness, George and Bessie came to the gate with us. George held his closed lantern high, and it threw a circle of light over his face, that had been the first to regain its usual look,

under the parting thanks and compliments of his guests. Bessie stood by his side, and when we turned to wave our last good-night, a strange fancy took me. In that quivering light that shone on her hair, that lit up her sweet face, so like and yet so unlike our merry, bright-coloured Bessie's, in her fluttering white dress, I thought it was Bessie's ghost I saw standing by George, and looking with wistful eyes on us, and on her village home.

We did not talk much on our way home. Bill scarce opened his lips as he walked with bent head by widow Troughton's side.

I had evil dreams all night. Every time I fell asleep they came. They were always of Bessie. Sometimes she was running as she had run that night Mr Ellis and I had run after her. I could not come up with her—she was always in front of me; then it became a low wide marsh; Bessie was gone, but over the dark swamp the blue flame of will-o'-the-wisp was dancing. Sometimes she was lost and we could not find her anywhere; then it was a flower we wanted to get, over a precipice, and it slipped when we tried to grasp it, and somehow the flower was Bessie. Once it was Mrs Compton's story come true—the guests were come, Bill and Mr Orwell were waiting, and Bessie was amongst us, in her stiff brocaded dress and bridal veil, but she was a dead Bessie, we knew.

It was always Bessie, and always Bessie's wedding-day. I awoke in the dark, frozen with fear. I heard the night sobbing outside as the rain-drops gently pattered against my window-panes. When I went to sleep again, it was Bessie singing I heard. Faint and far away, then coming nearer and rising louder, until, like a scream of agony, it smote me. This time, when I sat up in my bed, I knew it was the howl of the wind I had heard, tearing past, hiding itself in the mountains, only to return again with a shriek. The moon was hidden, but I could dimly see the boughs, the trees rocking and bending, throwing their branches about like wild beseeching arms. It was as if all nature was protesting and entreating against some evil spirit's power.

I could not sleep—I was excited. A sense of evil was on me like a presence. A bodily sin seemed standing near me; it had come into my room as I slept. I lit my fire and my lamp, and yet the brightness could not make me shake the feeling off.

I was afraid, and thoughts of Bessie's looks and song made the tears rise and the sobs come; and yet, for all my fears, I could not believe in evil finding us out.

Evil was like death to us at Carbeck—a thing we hear of every day, but which we cannot realise will ever come to us.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I MUST have fallen asleep in my chair; for when I started up and looked about me my fire was out, the lamp was flickering, and the grey light was stealing in through the window-blinds. I went to the door to see what kind of morning it was. It was like looking on at the rising of the ghosts at cock-crow. The mists were lifting themselves up in queer shapes on every side. Some were silently creeping up the hills to heaven, others were gliding leisurely across the valleys, or still lying fast asleep in bands midway up the mountains, whose peaks were beginning to stand out black and grim above them. It did not look as if evil spirits had guarded the earth last night. In the rising sun the mists shone like white angels.

Through the rents and flaws of the slowly yielding vapour I could see the lake merrily shining; here a cottage, there a tree whose leaves shone like

red and yellow flamelets. Suddenly some power seemed to seize the laggard mists, and they rose upwards in a cloud; the black peaks were lost to view; until from the mountain-tops blew gusts that broke up the mass into shreds. Then away it flew into light fleecy clouds that scudded across the blue sky right fast and merrily.

It was going to be a beautiful day, but I had not the heart to care. As I was turning to go indoors again, I caught sight of a man running towards the house. It was like George's figure, of a portly size; but George never came out of his farm so early, and when he walked it was always with the step of one who feels his weight. I stopped and shaded my eyes with my hand, for the sun dazzled me. Every minute brought the man nearer, and gave me a clearer sight of him; yes, it was George hurrying across the fields.

"Is Bessie here?" he asked, as soon as he was within hearing distance. I saw that his cheeks were pale and seemed to quiver.

"Bessie! nay," I answered.

Then I ran indoors to see if she had not entered while I slept into her own little bedroom, for we do not lock our doors at Carbeck at night, and the lassie might perhaps have come in. But one glance told me Bessie had not been there. The room was empty and quite tidy. George was peering over

my shoulder when I turned. He now sank down in a chair.

"Where is she, do you think?" he asked, helplessly, looking at me.

"Why, is she not at home? Is she not in the dairy or the orchard? What makes you fear for her?" I cried impatiently.

"Her bed's—not been slept—in," said George, slowly, his eyes still clinging to my face.

I sat down on a chair opposite to him, for my knees all at once seemed to give way under me.

"Did aught happen after we left last night? Did any one come?" I asked.

"Yes," began George—but at that moment Bill entered. "I saw farmer Lang come in, so I thought I might come in also," he said.

"Eh, lad!" cried George, hopefully, "you'll tell us about her. She's been to your mother's—or she's been wandering about with you — I'll be bound. I was a bit rough with the lassie last night, and she's not been reared roughly. So——" but George stopped, for Bill's face showed he did not understand him.

"Bessie's not been at mother's—I've not seen her. Is she not at home?" the lad asked.

"Nay, she's not," cried George, angrily, looking from Bill to me. "The lass has played us a trick, and I'll punish her for it. She's roaming about

in the mountains to frighten us, that's what she's doing."

"But tell us," I said, breathlessly—"tell us, did any one come last night?"

"Mr Ellis came," said George.

"Mr Ellis! I knew it! It was his face I saw against the window-panes. Oh! why, why did I not tell it?" I cried.

"Yes, he said he had looked in—but what of that? There, Bill, do not look like a dead man about it," cried George, huffily; "we'll find her yet. I tell you, it was my fault; I was rough with the lassie."

"If you would tell us, sir, what happened?" said Bill, very calmly, putting his hand out and grasping a chair hard.

"Well, that's what happened,—though there's not much to tell—as you'll see—though it was strange enough," said George. "After you had all gone, and Sally had gone to bed, for she felt tired, I was smoking my pipe by the chimney-corner, and Bessie was sitting by me on a stool, not saying much. Mr Ellis came in. I was right down struck with wonder at seeing him, coming so unexpected at such a late hour, too. And Bessie started as if she had seen a ghost. He did not take any notice of her, which moidered me, seeing they had been such friends; nor did she notice him, but kept sitting with her

hands crossed over her knees, quite quiet. Says he to me, 'Mr Lang, I've had a great sorrow. I've been betrayed by the one I trusted most in this world. The past is all destroyed, and the future is taken from me. I'm going away very far; but I felt as if I must see the old place again, the place where I've spent the happiest, nay, the only happy hours of my life.' He spoke in a very melancholy voice; and I noted how altered he looked—not the same man. I told him how sorry I was to hear such poor accounts of him, but I hoped things were not so bad as he thought—and——"

"Yes, sir—go on, sir," urged Bill, when George stopped for breath.

"Well, said I to him, 'I wish you had come in an hour or two ago, sir; we were having a feast for Bessie's betrothal—to the lad you heard of—and it would have raised your spirits a bit to have partaken of the supper, and to have heard the speeches and the singing.'"

"What did he say?" said Bill, between his teeth.

"He said, looking dark enough, 'Nay, Mr Lang, a man who has been betrayed is not a pleasant guest at a betrothal feast. The sight of another's bliss might make him wax dangerous. It was better for me to skulk away in the dark, while your lads looked about for who had peeped in at the festivities through the window. You do not understand—let my words

pass—they're of no consequence to any here.' I told him he judged us ill, and I asked Bessie if it were not so—but she did not answer, or look round, or move, no more than if she were a stone. She remained stock-still."

"Go on, sir," said Bill, drawing his breath hard.

"I am going on," said George, irritably, "although I think it's only waste of time telling all this; it would be better to look for Bessie."

"Nay, sir, I must hear it first!" cried Bill, with a look of passion in his face.

George looked at him, and went on more smoothly. "I was angered with her for turning a cold shoulder, like, on a gentleman who has always called himself a friend, and I showed it. Then Mr Ellis said, after a silence, 'I came over, for I had a haunting wish to see the old place again. This delightful, friendly kitchen; and, above all, the room up-stairs, where I have dreamt and painted and been happy.' These were his very words—I remember them, every one. 'I've left a picture there,' he went on to say, 'and some paints; and perhaps,' says he softly, looking towards Bessie, 'your daughter will help me to find them. She was always very good minding my things for me.'"

"And then?" said Bill.

"Still Bessie never moved," George went on, "no more than if she had not heard him. I asked her

if she had not heard Mr Ellis, and would she go with him and help him to find his picture? But she remained stock-still, not so much as stirring her eyes. Then Mr Ellis stepped over to her and called her gently by her name, 'Bessie!' like as if he were entreating her."

"And then?" said Bill.

"Then all her body twitched. She seemed to tremble, but for all that she did not move to go. Then I told her 'she was a headstrong girl, and I had noticed these last days how ill-tempered she had been, but that I would go myself with Mr Ellis,' and as I was getting up, he laid his hand heavily on my shoulder. 'Nay,' says he, 'you must not stir from your fireside. I'll not let you come. I'll go to the old room by myself, and have a last look.' But before going he again went over to Bessie, and said, like praying to her, 'Bessie, will you not come, for the last time?'"

"Then?" said Bill.

"This time, strange enough, she got up quickly, and went out of the room, not looking to the right or left of her, and Mr Ellis followed behind."

"Yes, just so," said Bill, with a gasp.

"Well, lad, I thought it queer enough," said George, fretfully. "It bothered me. I think I fell asleep over the fire, and I was woke up by Mr Ellis's voice at the door behind me, saying, 'Good-night,

Mr Lang, I'm late—I cannot stay for a chat;' and he was gone, without shaking hands with me—he who was always so friendly. I looked for Bessie, but she was not there, and then I saw it was past midnight. I went to the bottom of the stairs and called to her, and presently I heard her move and come down. She looked as if she were walking in her sleep, although her eyes were wide open and shining. She shambled as she came down, slowly, from right to left. She seemed afraid of me. I could have thought the lassie had gone daft. 'Bessie,' says I, 'have you angered Mr Ellis? He's gone off without shaking hands with me.'

"'Nay, father,' she answered, so low I could scarcely hear her, looking strangely at me, 'I've not angered him.' Then she came down slowly, still with that shambling step, until, coming close up to me, she sprang into my arms and clasped me tight by the neck, and she began to sob and cling to me, and ask me to forgive her and always love her. And what, you know, with her looking so pale at supper, and her contrary ways with Mr Ellis, I spoke rough to her, and told her she ought to be ashamed of herself, behaving like this, crying and making such foolery, she who ought to have been the cheeriest lass in Carbeck, betrothed to the canniest and best lad in the village. I unclasped her arms, maybe a bit sharply, and you see she's not been used to sharp-

ness, and so, you see, she most like pouted all night, and when it was light went out for a walk in the mountains. I noticed she had odd ways of walking by herself of late."

"Do you think she has gone off with him?" said Bill, slowly. "Nay, it can't be," he shouted, like answering himself, looking away from us, like over our heads; "it can't be."

"Nay," said George, turning sharply round on him; "gone away with him? Who dare say so? I heard her move about in her room more than an hour after. How can she, then, be gone away with him?"

"Bessie run away from us? Nay, nay," I cried. "She could not. She's in the mountains. Go ye and look for her, and bring her home to me here. But speak gently to her when you find her. Ah, Bill, do not be angry with her."

"If she's within walking distance, which way she's gone, I'll find her, and if I can make her come, I'll bring her home to you, Mistress Martin," said Bill, in a voice grown thin, with all the ring gone out of it, looking away from us, so that I could not see his face.

"I'll go with you, lad," said George.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN they left I got out the things ready for breakfast, and put flowers by Bessie's plate. Things must look bright for the lassie. They must look like welcome to her. "Run away with Mr Ellis!" It was only because Bill was her lover, and full of jealous fancies, he could think such things. Bessie could not deceive me, and keep a great, secret plan like that to herself.

Her strange ways the other night—her going away—her coming back—her restless talk, as if she would keep me by her side—her words about the Pharisees and the poor woman, all came back to my mind, as I buttered the oaten cakes she liked. She had said them because she had remorse, and thought it was a sin not to be able to love Bill as she ought. I had been harsh with her; I had frightened her. I would never be harsh again. I would always be gentle. Then I got out my prettiest cup and filled it with new milk, and put honey under the flowers.

When it was all ready it looked like a welcome, with all the pretty things gathered about her plate. "She'll feel the love of it," I said to myself, with a sob and a smile in my heart.

I could not rest when I had laid the table, but came and went to and fro from the garden gate. Whichever way I turned my head, I could see no sign of them bringing her home.

"I'll spin," I thought; "it's always heavy time waiting." But when I came to my spinning-wheel, I seemed to see Bessie standing there, as she had done the night of Bill's coming home, stroking the wheel with her hand, and looking round the room "like saying good-bye to it."

The thought went through me like a scythe-stroke. "How silly I am!" I said to myself, bustling away. "I'll go and prepare Bessie's bed. She'll be tired, poor bairn, and will be glad to lie down."

I made Bessie's room cosy, and drew her curtains, and as I turned back into the kitchen, I saw Sally Lang coming in. I shall never forget how Sally looked, her face all swollen with crying, and her black eyes round with fear, as she came forward, in the bright morning, the leaves and flowers dancing around her.

"I found this, pinned inside the first leaf of Bessie's prayer-book," she said. "I'm no scholard,

and could not read it, but I got one of my lads to read it for me."

I took the piece of paper she was holding towards me. It seemed torn out of a copy-book—maybe the little blue book. On it was written, in Bessie's large letters, for she never was a hand at writing easily—

"When you read this, I am run away. Although I am so wicked, ask Bill to forgive me. God lets me say my prayers for you, though He will not, for nothing else. I have tried not to run away. I was to have run away the night Bill came home. I did not. I kept near aunt till twelve o'clock, and that was the hour I was to have met him. But *now* I cannot stay behind—I *cannot*."

The closing words were written in larger letters than the rest, with a dash under the last. Then there came underneath the writing, two circles filling the rest of the paper. Over them was inscribed, "kisses," and inside one was written "for father;" inside the other, "for auntie." All the paper was blotted with Bessie's tears.

After I read what was written, a great trembling took me. Still I did not seem to understand or feel that Bessie was gone away, only to know it.

"Eh, dear soul, do not take on so," I heard Sally saying, like from a great distance, and I saw her round face, and wide-open black eyes, full of dis-

may, bending over me. "It 'ud be better if ye could make the tears come. I'll make ye a cup of tea. Maybe it's not far the lass has gone. If she went in the night she could not make much way, with the wind and the rain blowing up against her, and if she only went just before dawn, she's not gone far, and if they only take the right way soon, the men will come up upon her—that they will."

Then Sally brought me the tea, into which her tears were falling. "Drink that; a cup of tea is comforting."

I do not know if it was Sally's tea or what she said, or that I caught sight of the table with the flowers and the honey I had put by Bessie's plate, a bee now buzzing over it, but I let my cup of tea fall, soon as I had swallowed the first drop, and the sobs came; and when I began to cry, it seemed as if I could not leave off. Confused thoughts of Bessie came before me. Sometimes like when she was a child, talking out all her little joys and troubles to me. Sometimes, as she must have been last night, driven back, as Sally said, by the storm. I saw her pretty face all pale and lost-looking, her blown dress, and wet hair.

When the news spread that one of the girls had run away, and that girl Bessie Lang, the women began to crowd about me. Most of the men, who

could go, were out in the mountains, to help in the search for Bessie.

I sat by the fire, waiting for the news they'd bring. The women filled the room. They looked in at me from the windows and the doors; not talking loud at first, but in whispers, as if some one was dead; and the girls huddled together.

Widow Troughton was the first to speak out and to bemoan herself aloud.

"Eh! to think as 'tis the girl my boy has loved since he was a little lad, has been the first to bring shame on the village, and on her betrothal night too! The brazen-faced hussy! casting him off as if he were a bit of mud on her shoe, who is a man as Carbeck has never seen for canniness, and as upright and good as he is canny; all the great people taking notice of him, and she breaking his heart that has grown to her—careless as if it were a bit of delf. And maybe he'll take to drink, or he'll die."

"Poor lad!" said all the women.

"There never was heard the like in Carbeck," said Mrs Moulemont, who knew how to scold better than any one in the village—"never! The place is disgraced for ever! I'll be ashamed to hear my daughters say as they're Carbeck maids, as it was a pride to say it before."

"Yea, yea, the place is disgraced for ever!" moaned all the voices like echoes round me. Then

Mrs Compton said she had known evil was coming each time she looked at Bessie; and they all began to speak of her looks. I could hear Mr Horton's wooden leg thumping the ground, and his voice sounding as when he intoned Amen in church.

"'Tis but what I expected," he said. "'Tis the judgment of the Lord. When the Church was looked up to, parson and clerk and all the dignities, from he at the head to he as sat at the doorstep, as I may call it, Carbeck was an innocent place, like the Garden o' Eden. Then came new-fangled ideas about genius, and the evil one got power over it."

"Yea, yea, got power over it," took up the voices all round.

"My bridal poem is of no account now," said Mr Horton, acridly. "'Twould be better if I had written a lament over the shame of Carbeck."

It was as Bessie had said; there was not one who had a kind word to say for her amongst them all.

It was getting late, when there came a hush, followed by a stir. Some of the girls began to sob, and the women to mutter under their breath. They all made way; then George entered, followed by Bill. Mr Orwell came in with them. Seeing Bill, I felt that I had been selfish. I had only thought of my grief till now, and forgotten that he had lost all.

George sat down heavily on a chair; he had hold

of Bessie's letter, that Sally had sent after him by a lad. He looked worn out, but there was no tenderness in his expression. He had an obstinate, angry look. He hung his head down; Sally stood behind his chair, sobbing aloud.

"To think," said George, after a pause, in a trembling voice, "'tis a daughter of mine as has brought disgrace on Carbeck. The Langs, as have been the most honoured yeomen, father and son, as the oldest of ye can remember, respected and looked up to;" ("Yea, yea," said the voices all round)—"and now they're lower than the lowest of ye. They're eating the dust off the ground." Then, lifting his voice louder and louder, "To think as 'tis a daughter of mine has left her home, and played false to her lover, and brought shame on my grey hair and Carbeck—a daughter as I've reared as if she were a lady, as I've loved like the apple of my eye, as I've trusted;" then, raising his trembling hand, "I disown her—I——"

"Nay, sir," said Bill, laying his hand on George's arm; "nay, sir, do not say it." I saw the lad's pale face quiver; but his eyes were bent firmly on George, as if they would force him to be silent. George's arm fell down, but the dogged look did not leave his face.

"Let me speak," said Bill, standing up straight by George's side.

"You see I've known her, who is gone away, better than any of you." Then, as the voices all round murmured, "Yea, yea; the worse for ye, poor lad!" he put his hand up quickly. "Do not speak; let me go on. I loved her, and it was no wonder, no more than 'tis to love the sunlight; and it is right that some one should speak for her, who is gone away, and cannot speak for herself. You have said hard things of her; and this morning, when the news first came, hitting me straight at the heart, I was hard upon her too. I thought hardly of her. But when I heard all the things said of her, who was only yesterday pure and good—not one soul of you having one kind word to say for her; and when I was in the mountains, in the places she loved so much, it was all made plain to me. You see I knew her better than any of you." Here he paused suddenly, and grew a shade whiter, for Mr Horton was sneering under his breath, "Yea, yea, ye knew her well," and some women were muttering also. Bill cleared his throat, and went on, stumbling over his words. "Her heart yearned towards what was lovely. I've seen her eyes sparkle before some pretty bit of bloom; and she would sing more blithe than the birds on a fine day. Her head was full of fairy tales of her own making. Do you think a girl like that could care for a clumsy fellow like me?—one who cannot speak

out his love, but just hangs on her looks, like the bumble-bee on the flower."

"Pish!" grumbled Mr Horton; "'tis strange for you to make excuses for her." And many said, "Poor lad! ye were deceived in her all along."

Then Bill, who had paused, went on more rapidly. He spoke as if pleading for her.

"I felt she did not love me, but I knew she had no other fancy for any lad here, and I thought I could make the love come, by dint of care, as we make the wee flowers grow. I thought so. But she never lied to me; she never made pretext of loving me. Then, you see, when I went away, when I could not write often for the price of the postage, and she could not feel my love hedging her round about, that other man came,—a brilliant man with his words, who could paint pictures out of his head, and sing ballads all the day to her; and then"—(here Bill's voice trembled)—"the love came. It did not want to be reared like a flower; it grew at once. Then it was this that was made plain to me in the mountains; the old engagement dragged her down. It was like a stone about her neck. She tried to be true to it, but she could not. She tried with all her might to be true to me; but as she said in her letter, she *could* not. It was this that was made plain to me, that it was her betrothal to me that brought her to sin. It

was her betrothal to me that drove her from her home, and made her face things she did not know, poor lass, no more than a child."

Then, as Mr Horton still mumbled, and some of the faces still looked hard, Bill looked round angrily on them, with a look that seemed to say, "What have *you* to forgive her?" And with a sob, dilating his chest, he burst out—"I forgive her. Most like 'tis I who ought to ask her forgiveness for having bound her when she did not love me. And if I could make sure this man has married her honestly before the world, and has brought no shame upon her, I could forgive him too. But her I forgive; and God bless her!"

No one spoke now; and there followed like a long sob after Bill had paused. Then Mr Orwell said, looking different from usual, standing up straight, holding up his right hand, "If this man has forgiven her, it is like Christ having forgiven her. Let no one more cast a stone at her."

"Eh, lad! I could forgive her for your words," said widow Troughton, "if ye'll but say to me as ye'll never take to the drink, and your heart'll not break for her."

"Nay, nay, mother," said Bill, gently, "I'll not take to the drink;" but he did not say his heart would not break.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT night George, Bill, and Mr Orwell started for Scotland. It is easy to get married there, they said. It needs no parson, clerk, banns, or licence; and many times the blacksmith binds more couples than the minister. Maybe Mr Ellis had carried off Bessie, and been wedded to her there. It was dreary work waiting for the travellers to come back. It seemed as if all my heart had gone into the feeling of waiting. When they came back they brought with them no news of Bessie. There was no trace of her anywhere. It was as if she were dead.

The evening of his return from the search, Bill came in. I had not lit my lamp, but by the flicker of the fire I could see him standing, not so upright as he was a week ago, holding a square parcel under his arm.

"I've come to say good-bye to you, Mrs Martin, for to-morrow I'm starting for London," he said, in the thin voice that had never recovered its ring;

and I noticed as he walked in, his movements had lost their alacrity.

"Have you lost hope of finding her? 'Tis mighty soon to give it up," I said.

"It's in London I hope to find her," answered Bill. "It's his home. There his work lies." Then passing his hand through his hair, "I cannot rest, nor work until I know she's married to him. Until I know no stain rests on her name, it comes between me and every other feeling. I can think of nought else."

Sitting down and drawing his chair close to mine, he went on, "Tell me again about him. The ways that kind of make up the man. Here," laying his hand on the parcel resting against his knees, "I've got a picture he left at the farm. I'll study it till I know by heart the way he paints, so that, as my notion is his name maybe is not Ellis, I'll find him out through his pictures, knowing one wherever it's hung. And when I've found him," dropping his voice, "it will lie between him and me, if he can make her dishonoured."

"Eh, lad!" I said, weeping, "it's brave of you to speak like that. But nothing can wash away the sin of her deceit. Nothing can make her the same Bessie again."

"Mrs Martin," said Bill, tremulously, looking wistfully at me, "there are enough to fling stones

at her. All the hearts of the women in the village are hard like flint against her. They take nothing into account for her. Maybe she'll come back in misery some day, and when she comes there must be one to welcome her like of old."

"Bill," I cried, "no need to promise you that. Eh, lad! I cannot think of her sin, in yearning for a glance of her face again."

Bill and I sat together over the fire. We did not light the lamp; we did not care for brightness. We sat in the dark, with only the dancing of the flames to brighten the room. He made me tell from the beginning all about Mr Ellis; and sometimes he'd shelter his eyes with his hands, and his fingers trembled, especially when I repeated some of the speeches Mr Ellis made to Bessie, and her answers.

Well, I knew it was like stabbing him to the heart, each word I said; but he seemed thirsting to hear them like a parched man to catch drops of water.

"He could talk well," said Bill, droopingly.

"Talk! no miss of that! stories and ballads he'd grind like flour out of a mill. He'd spin them out quicker than I can spin thread out of my yarn."

"It's just the learning she liked," said Bill, who never seemed tired of looking at that fact—"and what I could not give her. Dry problems and figures only." All the time, I noticed, he never mentioned Bessie by her name.

When he got up to go he lifted his arms high as they could go above his head, and he raised his sad face to the ceiling—"When I know she's married to him for certain, when my mind is at ease about that, I'll go to America. I'll put tons of sea-water between me and Carbeck. They'll be sure to want railways out there; and after I've provided for my old mother, I can go and find work."

Then after bidding me farewell, he went, and his footfall on the little pathway outside sounded dragging like that of an old man.

Carbeck was never the same after the night Bessie left it. Mr Ellis had been right: the sin of one had its effect on all. The lads and the lassies never looked again with such boldly innocent eyes on each other. The mothers watched their daughters close. Some of the lads began to speak lightly of maids in general. George took to drink. He did not get downright drunk, but he went to the "Good Man" oftener than was good for him, and muddled himself up with beer, growing quite foolish, and sitting with his head hanging down, and doing nothing all day. It was not the sorrow only, it was the shame also, that drove him to it. It had been like a prop to him, the thought he was the most respected yeoman in these parts; and when it went, he could not stand up without it.

When George was in his cups he would tell over

and over again, to any one who would listen, how Mr Ellis had come to his farm, and the fine speeches he had made. And when he came to the part about Bessie, he would begin to cry and sob. Poor Sally lost all her comeliness from anxiously watching him. Ye could hear her fretful voice spreading a long way off, when she saw him coming across the fields, not straight along the path, but rolling from side to side. She would say harsh things to him. "That he was making a shame and a bizen of himself in the place. That he was showing evil ways to the lads," her voice growing louder as George only hung his head lower and took it quietly, not saying a word in answer. But she would not let the neighbours pass remarks on him. She would take his part then. "Maybe he takes a drop too much to cheer and comfort the heart of him that is broken. 'Tis not for the like of ye to find fault with him, you as have never had a daughter whom ye've loved and trusted like yerself, and who has gone and deceived you. And now he must hang down his head as was the highest here."

Mr Orwell was changed also, but it was differently. He still wore his leather breeches and white neckcloth; and Sancho and he looked after the sheep during the week-days, but he did not crack his joke so gruffly as he used to. He looked after the people more. He seemed sadder. He

never shortened the services now; and sometimes he said things in his sermons as went home to you. The people said the rector was not like his old self.

"Darn me!" I remember Jim Torrax saying, who was a bit of a wag, "if the parson does not seem to be holding a dark lantern, looking right into the inside of me, and not letting me see him. I call that not fair."

It did not seem strange to me that the people were altered. What seemed strange was that the old place remained the same, that it was so blithe and so careless — the mountains with the little brooks running down their sides, and the woods with the birds carolling, and the wild-flowers growing just the same now that Bessie was gone. I felt as if nature were a senseless power mindless of the misery of those it held.

I was always thinking of my lassie. I thought of her so much, I sometimes fancied I saw her with my eyes before me. She would pass across the room, or I would catch her standing by Bill's arbour. It was fancy bred from the yearning of my heart to see her again.

I knew she would be happy for a time. He had the power of giving her happiness, that we all lacked. He would paint her, and he would sing to her; and when Bill's search for her in London

proved fruitless, for the lad sought her far and wide, and gave his earnings to help to find her, then it came upon me Mr Ellis had carried her off to the countries he was always telling her of—the blue cave—the city on the water. He was rich, he would surround her with luxuries the little rustic lassie had no notion of before. Then, also, she would cling to him all the more for having given up all for him—even her duty. I seemed to see her bathed in the sunshine, breathing in the soft air of that lovely climate he would so often tell her of, with his love about her. Sometimes I almost fancied I heard her pleading with me to forgive her, and ask the others to forgive her for having secured this span of happiness.

Yet I knew every mountain-chain she gazed at would bring back to her the lines of her own mountains against the sky; and every narrow path winding up would carry her thoughts to the path before my door. Every lake would mind her of the lakes at home and of the tarns. And at night there was not a star that she would not know over which mountain-peak it brooded.

I knew thoughts of her home would creep into her heart and would call to her, especially when he was not by.

Then with all my sore anger against him, there was my mistrust of him. I fancied he would tire

of her one day. If it had not been that I felt sure that some time my lassie would want me, I could not have lived through that space of misery and shame.

Bill wrote seldom. After six months' stay in London he had settled down in Lirple, for Mr Stephenson had gone to dwell there while the railway was being made, after his search for Bessie had proved vain.

The lad worked hard at his profession. He threw himself into it as one who wants to have no leisure to think or feel.

Thus two years passed.

CHAPTER XXI.

Two years and a half after Bessie's flight, widow Troughton died. Bill was still under Mr Stephenson, but he might have got work on his own account, and he had taken out patents for several inventions. Widow Troughton died in more comfort than all her faith in Bill could have made her picture. She had caps, shawls, and gowns in her cupboard she had never put on, so grand they were. She had such a comfortable arm-chair, it was difficult to get out of once you had got in, it was so soft and deep; and she had more snuff than she could take. Bill often sent her presents too, and to Mr Orwell, queer books that pleased the parson mightily. Whenever the lad came to Carbeck he came to see me, but his visits were short ones. He came as little as he could.

His looks were much the same to those who glanced at him without care. He had not the same alert swing of his head back, but he was erect

enough. His eye was full of the thought of business—it was his workman's soul that shone in them; but when ye came to look into them, ye saw there was underneath an abiding trouble—a longing, as ye see in dogs' eyes on the watch for their master. There was a kind of hopelessness round the lines of his mouth; that was the change most noticeable in him. But the village people did not see any alteration in him. They thought he had got over Bessie's flight. It did him credit not to fret after a shameless lass, who cast the shadow of her sin over all the Carbeck maids.

Widow Troughton had an uneasy feeling that her son was changed, although she would not quite acknowledge it. "Sometimes I think," she said, "his heart is getting weaned from the thought of that girl, and sometimes I fancy, when I watch him, and he's not looking at me, that the trouble is eating away at him, and'll never leave off eating till he's laid in the churchyard. He's not half the man he was for spirits. It's always work with him—work, work—as if he'd hammer the thought of her out of his heart by work. Then sometimes, when he's telling of his plans, he's bright enough."

Bill, in his speech, had a way of putting quietly aside the idea of happiness for himself, like something quite out of the question. He took pride in his work. It gave him a sort of grand exultation

to see the plans he made carried out; but once out of that, back into the life around him, he was lost—he had no share in it. Nothing made the expression of misery rule over the other looks in his face as when some one congratulated him on any success.

One day I remember Bill had come in to see me. He was paying one of his short visits to his mother. He had just sold his patent for a new chair, I think he called it, for the railway, and he had brought her some rare fine furs for the winter.

Jim Torrax came and leant his elbows on the window-sill.

"Well, Bill, bless ye, man! the world will not soon be big enough to contain your inventions. To think as there were such a sight of things to find out a chap never thought of before, or felt the miss of. By the by, when ye find the way how to make a fellow irresistible, so that none of the lassies can find it in her heart to say nay to him, ye'll tell me."

"Yea, yea, Jim, I will," Bill said pleasantly, but a little hurriedly—"though to all appearance you do not want to know the secret."

"Apply your wits to it, Bill," said Jim, with serious intonation. "'Tis a long way more useful than what you've found out yet; and if ye've no more use for it, I'll feel obliged for the loan of it. But it's fair you should use all you want first."

Then came the look over Bill's face that revealed all his inward misery; it was as if his heart had shivered.

Mr Orwell guessed that to the lad his sorrow was as terrible and fresh as the day it struck him. Mr Horton said in my hearing to him, in his penny trumpet of a voice, blown through his nose, "Bill's no Jacob for constancy. He's never a thought of his old sweetheart now. 'Tis his genius has come to his help."

"Horton!" said Mr Orwell, who was sitting down, his two hands folded on the head of his stick, his chin resting on them. From under his overhanging eyebrows his eyes flashed on the one-legged yellow little man before him. "There's another kind of sepulchre than a whited one. There's one, where the flowers grow from the soil, that's richer for the dead it holds. Ponder over that, man! and don't let the stench of your unburied vanity reach my nostrils."

The afternoon of widow Troughton's funeral there had been a storm as I have never known in my days. I'll never forget it. It was dark as night sometimes, and then it would seem as if the heavens opened, and ye saw the glory of them for a second. Then there would come a peal, like the howls of devils at sight of the splendour of God. The heart of the storm was over Carbeck, but the

lightning played all over the sky. It was north, south, east, and west. There was a mountain-peak beyond the lake that it whipped as with a rod of serpents—red, yellow, white. The thunder roared. Sometimes there came like a wild halloo. All along it made me think that it was as if all the mountain pixies were up in fury defending the entrance of Carbeck from some one they hated—that they were hunting the creature down. After the storm had come the heavy rain. There was now the gurgle only of the full streams to remind one of the tempest, and the damp odours creeping through the night. The lights in the farms were out, but the stars were shining.

Bill looked depressed enough, sitting opposite to me, with his head resting on his hand. Suddenly he said—

"I'll go to America. When I came to feel that Mr Ellis had carried her off to foreign parts, and that I could get no clue to them anyhow, I made up my mind I'd go. So long as my old mother lived my duty lay straight before me, near at hand to her." Bill went on as if talking to himself: "But she's gone, and there's nothing more I can do for her, now she's lying by father's side, but place the stone with the inscription, and plant the apple-tree over them, as she wished. The account-book of my duty towards my poor old mother is

closed, so far as this world is concerned, and there's no one now for whom any of my doings will be of use or pleasure—no one," with a smile of remembrance, "for whom to tot them up and make a grand show."

Then, getting up and murmuring "courage" to himself, as if facing a lion, "I'll go away soon as I can. Maybe I'll get some of the old feel of vigour about me at the sight of the new country. There's something grand" — going to the hearth and sticking the poker into the fire, and letting it fall—"in a bit of work like that of cutting railroads across parts that no living man has been through, and across the prairies. There's many left to do the work in England."

"And, poor lad! there are so many memories for you in England."

"Yes," answered Bill, drawing in his breath, "it's that. If I could only forget, only for a day, not"—and he stopped; I knew what he meant—"but the yearning to know what's happened to her. If I could only rid myself of the thought that it's gone hard with her. It's just like an evil thing dodging me always. I could do without happiness," he said, resolutely gazing hard into the fire, his chin resting in his two hands. "Many a man has had to do without it before me. You pull along somehow. There's always the thought, it may be a

cowardly one, but it helps one on, that every day's like a step taken on a road, so much of the way done. Also, when a man's got work, and strength to do it, he's got the feeling he ought to do a turn for others, all the more that he no longer cares to do it for himself. But 'tis a queer feeling," he went on, relapsing into the way as if he were talking to himself. "A man wounded in battle, often, they say, does not feel the wound in the excitement. But when the victory's won, he becomes aware of it. He knows he's good as dead. So it's with me." And I saw his arm give a great twitch. "The day she left me I was shot to the heart."

It was the first time Bill had spoken out since the day of Bessie's flight, and his face was white like a body laid out; but still he did not call her by her name. "Well, lad, do what I will," I said, "the thought is always on me, that I'll hear news of her, or see her. These latter days it's been on me that she'll come back soon."

"I thought for a long time that she would come back," said Bill, passing his hand through his hair, and then again resting his chin wearily down on his two hands; "and as for the thought of seeing her, it never left me; so that, when the blow came first on me, and when my day's work was done, I'd go tramping by myself looking for her. Bless you! I saw her standing everywhere. I was wellnigh

daft with the sight of her sweet face I could not catch, looking at me from behind every tree-trunk and every coach that passed. But I've given up the hope now. I should have found her out had he carried her off to London. He took her off further than that—over the seas, you may be sure; and I've lost hope that she'll ever come home now."

No sooner had Bill said this, than against the window-panes and at the doors there came like a knocking all round us. The dog outside gave a sharp whine. It was such a ghostly sound, I could not help a shudder. Even Bill looked up in wonder.

"I almost could have thought some one knocked," he said.

"Nay," I replied; "it was the wet leaves and the twigs, blown by the wind against the window-panes. A funeral always makes one think of ghosts and fancy they're round us."

"Nay, ghosts have something else to do than mind us," said Bill, shaking his head, and laughing sadly. "If they could drop a sign to us, they that see and know so much more than we do, they'd not leave the heaps of questions that lie on our hearts, like so many gravestones, unanswered; questions about the dead and the living. They would give a word, unless death makes a mighty change in the heart. I tried them, once, do you know—that time

I told you, when I was nigh daft about finding her. Sometimes at night I'd go to a common near London, alone with my dog. 'Tis just a place to see spirits in, if there are any. And well I remember I was crazy with the yearning to hear somewhat of her; and as I was there all alone, I thought to myself of queer stories I had heard of spirits appearing and answering questions. That night, I said with all the force of my will to the spirits, 'Come! If there are any that have a care or pity for me, come! and give me a clue where to find her.' I was in such a state of waiting, that every sense was quickened a hundred-fold; but not a whisper did I catch. In such solitude, every motion of the dumb creatures around you has a significance; a pricking of Carlo's ear would have meant something; but not a sound came I could not account for. So when morning dawned I said, 'It's not in the laws of nature that spirits can come to the earth. A man can only reckon on his brains.'"

The moment Bill paused, there came again that noise of tapping at the window-panes, the roof, the door, followed by like the sobbing of a ghost through the trees outside.

"'Tis uncanny—like an omen," I said; and I went to the window and threw back the curtain.

The trees, the fields, the river, and lake, were stretching out in the moonlight. It was a spectral

world, with an occasional gust of wind shaking it; but there was not a sign of any being stirring in it.

"Nay," said Bill, rousing himself, and turning round, "it is what you said—the twigs of the creeping rose-tree tapping at the window, and the shaking off of the rain-drops by the trees, that makes the noise. And your soul is straining through your body to hear somewhat of the world where mother's just gone. Come back. I've something on business to say to you."

Then, as I returned to my seat by the chimney-corner, he began, in his awkward stumbling way—

"I've put aside a little money, and I've left it—to—to her. There's no knowing when she may want it. I'm going a long way; I may be drowned or killed; so I made my will. But it was a harder job than I thought to make things clear. There's no need waiting for my death to give it to her. The lawyers made a difficulty about that. They were so eager to make it all right by law, that there was no place left for my meaning. It was the last thing they minded. So I appealed to Mr Orwell, and he's made it right for me. Should she come back, you've to go to him; or if you hear she's in trouble or want. You promise me?"

I nodded.

"And the rector'll tell you who you're to go to, in case he dies before." Bill resumed: "And if

she never comes back, then—I've asked the money may go to help some poor lad in his education, as I was helped. And there's just one thing more,"—drawing out a small roll wrapped in paper from his waistcoat-pocket,—"here's a little money at hand. Should she come back ill—you see, you must have it to get her all she wants."

That moment there came again the sound of knocking; but this time it could not be the tapping of the wet leaves against the window-panes. It was a single rap at the door, very low, but quite distinct.

I ran to the door and flung it open, and then what happened is like a dream. Something—I scarcely knew at first what it was, rolled or tumbled in—fell forwards, and caught itself up, by clinging to the wall. Then I saw it was a woman, pressing tight a baby against her chest. "Oh let me in, I have walked so far!" she gasped.

Behind me came a cry from Bill, loud, clear, "Bessie!"

Yes, it was she who slipped down and lay like dead on the ground at my feet.

CHAPTER XXII.

YES, it was Bessie come back! I knew it by the lines of her features; but everything else had faded away entirely. A long bit of ruddy chestnut hair fell over one shoulder, and showed up the paleness of her lips, cheeks, and closed eyelids.

I looked up and saw Bill. His face had an expression of agony and yet of almost foolish gladness. He stood looking down at her, his mouth squared, his eyes hungry and questioning.

The baby, soon as Bessie fell, waked and began to cry. I saw it was fastened by a shawl tied across Bessie's chest. It was a bonnie wee thing, round and plump, that stretched its arms to me, and fell asleep again soon as it was taken out of its uncomfortable position. Bill had not noticed the child; but when his eye rested on it, there came like a strangled sob in his throat, and he turned away, hiding his face in his hands. A fire still burned in the grate. On the rug I laid the babe,

and returned to Bessie. "Is she dead?" I asked, full of awe and despair, as I took up her head and pillowed it in my lap.

"Nay," said Bill, who was again looking at her. There was some of the old ring in his voice as he said, "Undress her if you can. Put some blankets before the fire to warm. We must lay her in them. I'll go to mother and ask her for some cordial." And he was gone. In his bewilderment he had forgotten his mother was dead.

I tried to obey him. I put some wood on the fire and some blankets before it to warm, and cut open Bessie's dress. Out of her bosom where it lay tumbled the little blue copy-book where Mr Ellis used to copy the ballads for her to learn—this book. I put my hand on her heart, and my ear to it, and to her mouth, but I could feel no quiver. I noticed she had on the same gown she wore on her betrothal night, tattered and muddy, but I recognised its pattern. There was no wedding-ring on her finger—only the baby to tell of the past.

As she lay so white and quiet, I thought, "No one could have the heart to throw stones at you now, my lassie!"

I rubbed her hands and breathed into her lips, but no flutter came. "Bessie, Bessie!" I cried in her ear. I thought I should go mad, having her so close in my arms, and not able to make her hear me.

Then Bill returned with a little brandy in a bottle. We lifted her up and put her into bed; and I cut away her clothes from her, and wrapped warm dry things about her. We rubbed her arms —her breast with brandy, and dropped a few drops between her lips. After a while there came a pulsation, no more, like a faint quiver. It reached her eyelids, and in a blessed moment she opened her eyes. Then I saw the same foolish look of gladness come on Bill's face.

For a moment Bessie's eyes rested on me, and the joy in my heart was more like a sharp pain cutting through it. Then they turned to Bill, and rested on him, and she whispered, "I have brought my baby home."

After this, she fainted dead off again. Bill worked long and hard to prevent her dying. She would come to, and then slip away again. We beat up an egg in brandy, and fed her by drops, and little by little we gained ground. Once I saw her looking uneasily about. I knew it was for her baby, so I brought it and laid it on a pillow by her side.

At last she lay with her eyes open gazing at Bill, her cheeks burning, a restless look on her face, her pulse beating quick with fever.

"I've walked all the way from Richmond," she said, talking very fast, as if she were repeating it

by rote, "to bring my baby home." Then she panted. "Baby felt very heavy sometimes, but I kept by the coach-road, so I did not lose my way. Sometimes I got a lift; and the other night I slept in the workhouse. The thought of you, Bill, cheered me. I had a kind of feeling as you would stand up for me—you, and aunt Martin too." And here her voice failed her.

"Do not speak, Bessie, if you can help it," said Bill, "we'll talk about things another day."

Bill's voice was trembling with tenderness. This was the second time he had pronounced her name, he who had never said it all the time she was gone; now he lingered over it, as if it filled his mouth with sweetness.

"There's not like to be another day; I must tell it now," she replied, in that quick voice and laboured breathing.

"Make a clean breast of it, Bessie, if you can," I said; "you'll feel easier after. Were you in London all the time?"

Bill's hand closed over my arm, bidding me be still.

"No," answered Bessie, "he took me to his yacht, and we went abroad." And during a moment's silence she seemed to dwell on this little span of happiness. Then she muttered, how, after her baby was born, a year and a month ago, he grew tired of

her. "But baby was not to blame," putting her arm round her child, and looking up, appealing to Bill. "And still," she said, "this baby has been my teacher. She taught me how wicked I had been. She has pleaded and pleaded for you. I felt she was like a traitor to him, minding me always of you."

There was something curious in the beseeching look she cast on Bill, as if she were trying to enlist his love for her child.

Then, after a longer pause, she related how a little time ago he had taken her to Richmond, near London. How she had felt near home, and one day she found a map of the Lake country, and "I looked at it every day. I used to show baby it was somewhere there that lay the little path leading up to aunt Martin's cottage."

"Then, one day," continued Bessie, after panting on her pillow, "he said he would take care of me and baby, but he must marry some rich lady."

At these words Bill gave a gasp.

It was terrible to see this wild, haggard creature, lying on her deathbed, struggling through this confession of those past years. But we could not stop her. She told, with the words lingering on her parched, dark lips, "How she had never thought of that. How when she had asked him to marry her, he had used to answer she did not really love him, if she did not trust him. She was his wife before

God, what did a ceremony of ten minutes matter? And 'it seemed like begrudging love to press for it.' When he told her he must marry some one else, she cried. Then he seemed to hate her, and kept away."

After this there came a longer pause, but the narrative was not over yet. We could see by the glitter in her eyes that something yet remained untold. Making a superhuman effort, Bessie resumed, in a whisper, "One day I took baby with me, and I tracked him to her house. I waited about till they came out together. I knew, by the way he looked at her, it was her. Then I began to tell her. She looked frightened, but she could not pass me, for I knelt before her. Then I know he said it was all false what I said, and he would give me in charge if I so much as came near the house again, and then they went away together, and I felt I must come home. I went back to Richmond first, and I took a little money to buy milk for baby, and some bread for myself. And I put on the dress that was mine, I had kept for love of it, and I followed the way of the Cumberland coach, to bring my baby home."

We knew her story was told now. She had scarcely said the last words when there came, close beside me, a cry—a cry that seemed to escape from Bill's heart, as if it had been shut up there those years.

"What has happened makes no difference, Bessie. I love you the same as I did before. I'll take you for

my wife, and love and tend you, if you'll let me. We'll go away to America, and baby'll come, too. No one will know us—not a soul; and we'll never think of the past—there'll not be a cloud of it come between us. If you'll but get well, Bessie, I'll strive to make you happy—all the strength of me body and soul will."

Bill's words seemed to reach Bessie's soul. For the first time, I felt how it was not only Bessie's thin, worn body that had returned to us, but that Bessie's spirit had come too.

Her rigid lips quivered, and there came into her eyes a flicker of the old, tender light which she sometimes turned on Bill, before Mr Ellis came, when he said or did anything that won her praise. "You are so good, Bill," they seemed to say again.

But it was only for a second of time. The misery came and blotted out that look.

"Nay," she said, passionately, suddenly turning her head round to the wall, and pressing it down on her pillow, "I do not *want* to get well; I do not *want* to live—not even for baby. Had I not *known* I was dying, I could not have faced you or aunt. It was the thought of death made me brave."

Then pressing her face tighter down on the pillow, and throwing her arms above her head, she moaned out, "I cannot help it—I love him still; and it's the thought of his painting some one else, and

his singing to her, that kills me. So long as I am on earth I must love him. But oh, Bill, after I am dead, if God is kind, and punishes me only for a while, then in heaven I shall love only you."

After a pause, she added, more meekly, turning round and looking on her child, "But baby will comfort you. She will make it all up to you. She has such pretty ways already of comforting."

Bill had made his way to the window, when Bessie moaned out that she still loved Mr Ellis. The curtains were drawn back, and the moonlight streamed into the room, but he was in the shadow, leaning his head heavily against the panes.

"Comfort from *his* child?" he said, turning quickly round. "Comfort, when each time I look at it, it'll remind me of the love that was between you two!"

"Oh, Bill," whispered Bessie, dragging herself up, "you do not mean that you'll not protect baby after I am dead?" Then she paused, making acquaintance with this new grief she had not expected. Bill turned away again, leaning his head down in the shadow.

"Bessie, I'll take the darling baby," I said, "and love her as I loved you."

"Ah, but I wanted Bill to take her," replied Bessie. "He's the only one as could make baby quite happy, and I thought she might make amends to him."

Then turning, she looked at the sleeping child, whose hair in the bright light was shining like the halo, in pictures, round the head of the baby Christ. In the white moonlight that flooded the room, and that fell like a blessing upon the mother and child, I saw a strange likeness between the chubby, innocent baby face, and the sunk face of the sinful mother, whose eyes were so full of straining love, you thought they must wake the babe.

"Oh, Bill, look how pretty she is! and you have not seen her when her eyes are open, and when she laughs. And if you do not take her away, they'll point at her, like a child of shame. There never was one at Carbeck before. They'll teach her to hate and despise me. I never thought you would say no, Bill—never. I thought all the way how happy she would be when she was a year or two older—just as I was when I went blackberry-gathering with you. I seemed to see you both, and baby holding up her basket for you to fill. I never thought you'd say no. I thought as she was the only one thing I had in the world to give you, to ask your forgiveness for my wickedness to you."

Still Bill did not stir from the window: the deep gurgle of the streams and the brighter noise of the foam dashing over the stones were the only sounds that broke the silence when Bessie paused.

"Bill," she began again with more energy, "I never

thought you'd say no — never. I trusted you. I had a kind of feeling you had forgiven me, so I could think of you when I dared not think of the others. The thought of your goodness was stronger on me than the thought of my sin. I thought, all the way, if I could only come to you, all would come right for baby and for me with her, who am her mother, and the one who has brought disgrace and dishonour on her. I said to myself, all the way,—'I used to call Bill the mender-general, and he'll mend my broken heart, and mend baby's life, so that she'll never know as there was a big crack in it, even before she drew breath.' Oh, Bill, listen to me! Look at me!"

Bill had made a sudden move, but it was not to turn round. It was only that his head had fallen lower on his arms clasped over the window. The moonlight fell on his head now as it fell on the babe's and the mother's, uniting the three in its forgiving light.

"She never had a father," continued Bessie, pleading—"never. He was sorry she was born. He never noticed her or kissed her." Then quicker she went on,—"You need not mind a love that'll die when I die. I know my spirit will be washed clean of it. It will only have love for my innocent baby and for you, Bill, if you'll only be merciful to me and take her. It will always be near you. And if the

thought of me hurts you, you might fancy she was Bessie come back in the shape of a little child who has done no sin. Oh, Bill, be merciful! You would take her, if I were to live. Why should you cast her off, if I die?"

Then Bill turned from the window, came forward in the moonlight and said in a quiet voice, "I'll take the child. Live or die in peace, Bessie. I'll be as a father to her, and love her as if you had been my dear wife who had borne her to me."

Then making a step towards the baby, and looking down on it sleeping open-mouthed, breathing placidly, its face and hands touched with a wonderful radiance, he said,—"I do not know if you've christened her; but she'll be Bessie to me. Bessie, I take you from this night forth to be my daughter. To love, to rear, and to educate you; and when you grow to be lovely, to guard you from evil men. To bring you up in the fear of God, and with the love of your mother always in your heart, shall be the first object of my life from henceforth, so help me God!"

Then as Bill lifted his eyes I saw the abiding trouble that had dwelt in them since Bessie's flight, was gone.

After Bill had spoken, Bessie quickly threw the coverlid over her face and began to sob. I thought she must die at every sob shaking her weak body; and I wanted to see the peace on her face once

more. When the sobbing was stilled she wandered. She never became quite conscious again; but she knew us all. Bill, her father, Mr Orwell, and me; but she remembered us as before her fall. Death was kind, and killed in her the memory of that first. There would sometimes come like a question in her eyes as if she remembered dimly something, and she would look yearningly round. Once I brought the child to her, feeling sure it was the sight of it she craved for. But when she saw it she fainted, whether from joy or because it was a sign the half-remembered past was true I could not tell: I kept the little one away after that.

She did not live many days. The doctor said it was the low fever that killed her. I knew it was a broken heart. She was our Bessie once more, after the memory of her fall was blotted out of her soul. A faded Bessie, her playful ways, her innocent coquetries all came back. She was like a dream of herself. It was strange her very last words to me were,—"I knew, aunt, Bill would not forget me, although he was so long away."

Bill had watched by her day and night without stirring. To the last he had hopes she would yet live, and be his wife some day. But she died, and it was well. Death lifted the shadow of her sin away. Even George forgave her, and was always sober after.

Eh, I know now it was in mercy death was sent into the world with sin. Not the sharpest tongue for scandal, or the stoutest heart for sitting in judgment, has courage to brag in the presence of Death. It is the hush round the one who sleeps till Judgment Day none dares to break. Then it robs sin of more than half its power of evil. These two years she was away, Bessie's sin had fallen like a blight over the village; but now her grave pleads more with the lassies to keep good than all the rector's sermons.

We buried Bessie in the sunniest corner in the churchyard; Bill placed a little slab of marble over her head with only her Christian name engraved upon it. It is the floweriest grave there is. 'Tis my share to mind it, and I always see there's blooming over it some of my lassie's favourite flowers. I've planted some of her own double daisies, balsams, a carnation, and a bit of sweet-smelling thyme from her own garden. I thought she would like best slips of the flowers she tended herself. And even in winter there's always a bit of green over her, for I have put a holly-bush at her feet." And here Dame Martin paused.

"And Bill?" I asked, presently. "Did he take the child?"

"Yes, he took her to America, with a London nurse who knew nothing of her story."

"And did he never marry? Did he never forget Bessie?"

"It was not much use my telling you the lad's story, if you can ask me that of him!" answered Dame Martin, giving such an indignant poke to the fire that the sparks sputtered and the flame roared up the chimney.

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